Savannah Hauk

Living with Crossdressing

Book 1 - Defining a New Normal

Book 2 - Discovering Your True Identity

Contents

Book 1 Defining a New Normal 4

1.1. Acknowledgements 9

1.2. Quick Notes 10

1.3. Am I Being Too Foreword? 11

1.4. History of Crossdressing 13

1.5. You Might Be A Crossdresser If... 16

1.6. Why We Do It 29

1.7. Lifers And Late Bloomers 34

1.8. Truth And Consequences 39

1.9. Savannah's Story 43

1.10. Our Story – Savannah & Jen 54

1.11. Jen, In Her Own Words 65

1.12. The Last Crusade 69

1.13. Other Stories – A Fairytale 71

1.14. Other Stories - Crosses to Bear 77

1.15. Other Stories – Late To The Party 86

1.16. Other Stories – Amanda... 93

1.17. The New Gurl 100

1.18. Masculinity vs Femininity 103

1.19. Have You Heard That Joke? 113

1.20. From Closet To Coatrack 116

1.21. The Purge 120

1.22. What Is Normal? 122

1.23. Balancing Acts 125

1.24. Haters Hate 129

1.25. My Better Half 134

1.26. Sex, Lies & Videotape 141

1.27. You Can't Handle The Truth 146

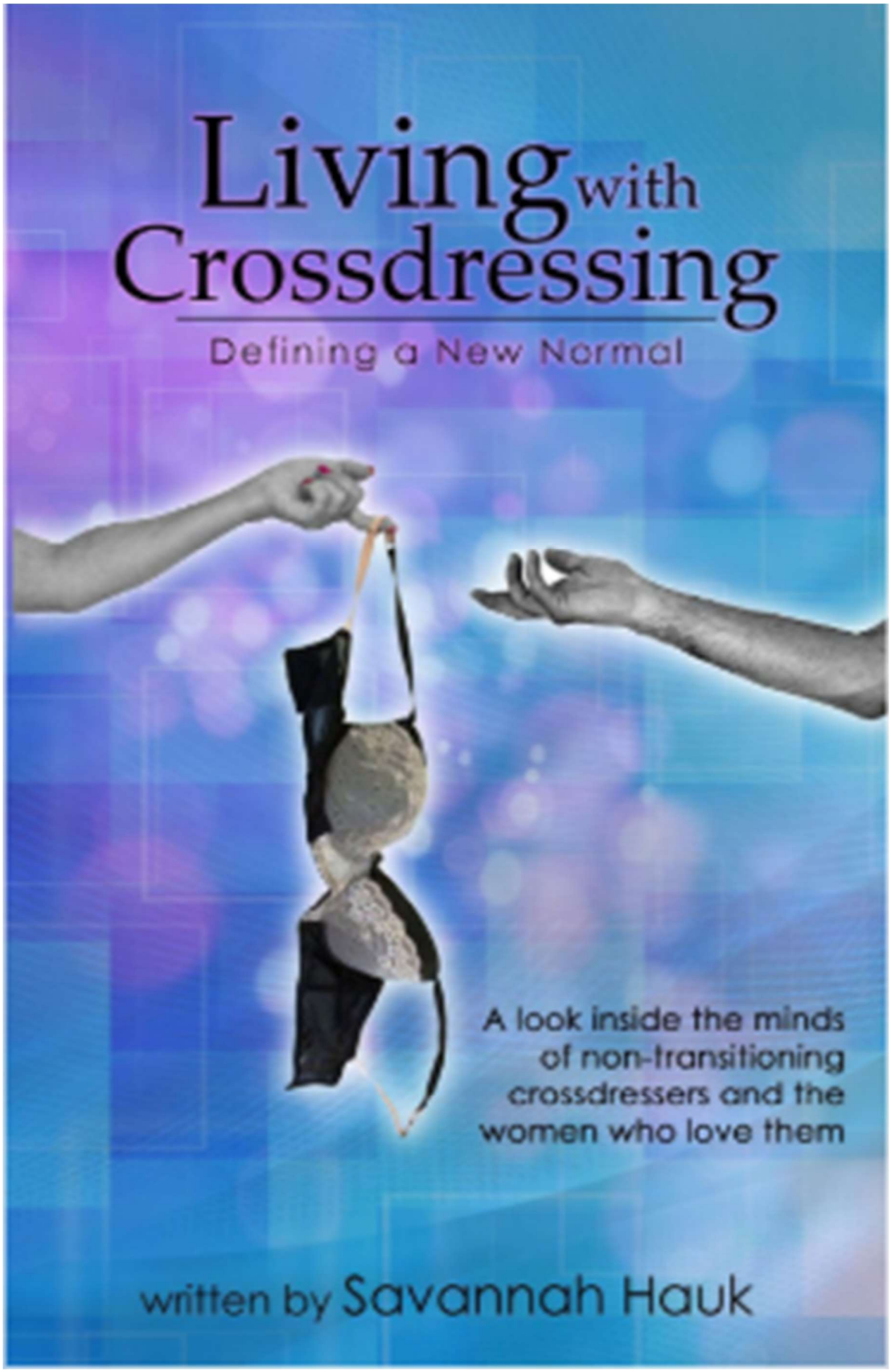
1.28. Reluctance 150

1.29. Is This Goodbye? 152

1.30. Resources & Bibiographies 153
1.31. Transgendered Terms 154
1.32. About the Author 161
Book 2 Discovering Your True Identity 162
2.1.Dedication 166
2.2. Acknowledgements 167
2.3. Good Housekeeping 168
2.4. Am I Being Too Foreword? 169
2.5. Living on the Spectrum 170
2.6. History of Crossdressing 183
2.7. You Might be a Crossdresser if... 186
2.8. Why We Do It 202
2.9. Crossdressing Lifers 208
2.10. Crossdressing Late Bloomers 212
2.11. Binary and Non-Binary 214
2.12. Savannah's Story 221
2.13. The Pink Fog 236
2.14. Masculinity vs Femininity 241
2.15. Did You Hear About The Crossdresser? 248
2.16. Balancing Acts 260
2.17. You Can't Handle The Truth 262
2.18. Why Thinking ‚What's Wrong' Is Wrong Thinking 265
2.19. Why Fear Never Disappears 271
2.20. Why Crossdressing is Still Conforming 275
2.21. Halloween – The Crossdressers' Christmas 278
2.22. Facing the Public 281
2.23. Are Crossdressers Good Advocates? 287
2.24. A Semblance of Normality 290
2.25. I Can't Get No Satisfaction 297
2.26. Public Relations 302
2.27. Is This Goodbye? 310
2.28. Resources & Bibliographies 311

2.29. Transgendered Terms 312
2.30. About the Author 319
2.32. A few photos of author 321

Book 1
Defining a New Normal


Living with Crossdressing
Defining a New Normal
A look inside the minds of non-transitioning crossdressers and the women who love them
written by Savannah Hauk

Observations and Thoughts for Non-Fetish, Non-Transitioning Crossdressers and the Women Who Love Them

Written by Savannah Hauk

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

LIVING WITH CROSSDRESSING: DEFINING A NEW NORMAL
First edition. January 1, 2018.
Copyright © 2018 Savannah Hauk.
ISBN: 978-1386938354
Written by Savannah Hauk.

Hoping that people of all faiths, ethnicity, gender, and orientation can come together in love and understanding – beyond simple tolerance.

Remember, tolerance can be defined as simply resisting the urge to prohibit the expression and ideas that we find unpleasant or disagreeable. Acceptance begins with embracing and celebrating those different than us.

1.1. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone I have met on my crossdressing journey for this feminine creature who I call Savannah. They have provided an invaluable lifeline. You will get a sense of some of these people throughout this book.

First and foremost, I must thank the love of my life. Jen is a steadfast and free-spirited woman who has evolved with me as I have evolved. We complement each other. Our growing understanding of what the new normal could be is intriguing, exciting and all I could hope for.

I would like to thank my ex-wife for being part of my life when the move to New York City seemed insurmountable, otherwise. I wish her well in her own life's journey.

I'd like to wish to thank all of the couples that have so graciously accepted my invitation to share the intimate and sometimes painful details of their own journeys. They have enriched Jen and my life, just as I hope we have done for them. In their own subtle ways, they constitute a new forward-thinking tandem when it comes to what a relationship between a crossdressing man and a woman can be.

I would like to thank my closest friends who have shown Savannah their support. Love and hugs go out to my sister and her husband. Not every family member would be so open-minded.

This list also includes all of my Savannah gurlfriends (men who are transgender) who continue to raise me up, never questioning my passions.

Finally, I send out a thank you to all others who have touched my life in some way. One way or another, you have steered me to be the person you see before you.

1.2. Quick Notes

PRONOUNS

I understand that heated discussions rage around the concept of proper pronoun usage. I don't wish to offend any individual by using the wrong masculine or feminine pronoun to describe them. But for ease of reading and understanding for the novice – especially for those readers who are new to the community – I will be using the masculine pronouns of *he*, him, and *his* when referring to men and to crossdressing men. I will be using *she* and *her* when referring to cis-women. Transgender women will also be described as *gurls* or *gurlfriends*, where appropriate in the storytelling.

As the debates on gender identity and identification continues, and new gender qualifiers become more popular, I am sure my pronoun usage throughout this book will quickly become archaic and unusable. Please be as accepting of this book as you hope people will be 'accepting of you, as this book is written in one moment in time where the prevailing societal ‚normal' is still that a man is he and a woman is she.

LABELS

There are many labels for the people who identify as crossdressers and transgender in the LGBTQ community. I have spoken to a few transitioned MtF women who have different opinions as to whether crossdressers should be considered part of the transgender community. In my writing, I will be taking the position that crossdressers are under the transgender umbrella in an effort to portray an inclusive and united community. I do mean to offend anyone's sensibilities as to their own interpretation of how they label others, only to bring us all together in a tighter bond of unity.

THE COMMUNITY

There are dozens of splinter groups within the LGBTQ community. From crossdressers to post-operative transsexuals, there is a vast spectrum of gender identities and sexual preferences. I do not mean to exclude anyone from my discussions, but I will be focusing primarily on crossdressing men and the cis-women who have chosen to stay partners with them. Just know that I have love and positivity for all of my brothers and sisters in the community in the hopes that they will have love and positivity for me in return.

1.3. Am I Being Too Foreword?

I do not possess a university degree in psychology, sociology or other sciences. I have at my disposal my observations and experiences with crossdressing. My credentials come from the School of Hard Knocks, as it were. I am a life-long crossdresser who has faced trials, self-doubt, and my share of worry about the known and fear of the unknown.

I have experienced shame, unhappiness and loneliness as a result of being viewed as abnormal by the general populace. But I have no shame for the man I am, for the woman I am... for the human being I am.

I finally decided to write down my thoughts and opinions on the subject of crossdressing, as a result of social media. That may seem like a strange notion... writing a book when I could be posting on my blog, vlog, YouTube channel or Twitter feeds like all the Millennial kids out there. I'm old school, simple as that. The anonymity that social media provides allows everyone to have an opinion (which they have a right to), but positive messages have gotten lost in the midst of the outpouring of intolerance and ignorance. I found my heart saddened to the point where I felt I must speak up.

Another reason, a more important reason, is that a man who needs to express himself as a woman faces solitude, shame and secrecy when in a relationship with a cis-gender woman (a cis-gender individual identifies with their biological sex) because they have a fear of being rejected and misunderstood. Where is the support for these men and their partners? Besides expensive marriage and couples counselors, there seems to be vague online community support for crossdressers and their significant others that, at times, seems to be quiet or defunct.

Imagine that you are the wife or girlfriend of a male crossdresser, either by admission or discovery. Imagine that you need to understand more about the situation you find yourself in. There is plenty of literature and websites out there to sift through. What do you find? There seems to be an endless parade of pantyhose-loving, hairy, corseted fetishists. You can read online fantasy fiction or watch Japanese hentai anime that may send a spike of fear into your heart. There are countless stories of crossdressing men who resort to surgery to alter their gender to that of a woman. It seems that all crossdressers are gay. What is this world in which my partner is involved?

I am not here to tell you that the road is paved, even, and easy to travel upon. There are victims on both sides of the relationship, but each must com put themselves in their partner's shoes.

Well, that should be easy! The crossdresser wants to wear her shoes anyway!

That adage is misleading because even though we (the crossdressers) understand the physical component of wearing her shoes (for me, the higher the heel the better) we cannot immediately grasp what it is like for a woman to come to grips with learning that the man they love is also sometimes a woman.

Many crossdressers have had years to come to terms with who they are. Sometimes, they are still a work in progress. Who am I kidding? We're always a work in progress!

But, we crossdressers have to understand that, regardless of when our partner is told about or discovers our feminine side, we are bound by love to communicate with her, be honest with her (and with ourselves), and be sensitive to her needs.

Have I caught your attention? Have I struck a chord within you? If so, I invite you to continue reading. Please take this journey with me. I can guarantee that, as the words flow from my fingers to the cursor blinking on the screen, I will be discovering more about myself as well.

I am, by no means, an expert on all things transgender. There are things that I don't know about the community and about life, for that matter. I accept that I am ignorant of many truths. That understanding and acknowledging allows me the capacity to learn.

Welcome, dear crossdresser. I hope I can illuminate your thinking and reflection on questions you may be struggling with. And a special welcome to you, the crossdresser's dear partner. You are the most important person in a crossdresser's life. I hope there is something of value in these pages that offers you a measure of enlightenment and hope. At the very least, please know that every word is written purely from my heart.

With warmest regards and love,

Savannah Hauk

1.4. History of Crossdressing

We owe a lot to Thomas Edison - if it wasn't for him, we'd be watching television by candlelight.

~ Milton Berle

It's hard to feel macho in makeup and a dress!

~ Milton Berle

POP QUIZ

This is your history lesson. There may be a quiz at the end.

Crossdressing is not a modern concept. Throughout history there are examples of it in many societies and cultures. Starting with the mythologies (Greek, Roman, Norse, Hindu, others), many examples exist of men masquerading as woman or being transformed into a female. The gods were known to come down from the heavens and take the guise of the opposite sex for the whim of spying or interacting with us mere mortals.

Many historical documents reference the concept of cross-dressing, whether male-to-female or female-to-male. The Bible, for instance, in Deuteronomy 22:5, includes the following passage:

> *„A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."*

Apparently, I'm an abomination!

I should stop writing now and start repenting!

Hey, I'm not here to preach to you about the sinful nature of the act of crossdressing. That is a personal belief. I simply illustrate that the writers of the Bible felt a need to speak to it. Many believe that the passage simply refers to the fact that to don the clothes of the opposite sex is a deceit and falsehood when used to such ends.

Throughout history, it was more common to see a woman take the guise of a man. In the last several hundred years, the social station of women in many cultures was that of a secondary citizen. What better way to gain respect, popularity for your ideas, and acceptance in society than by taking on the persona of the men you were trying to impress? Many women have served in various armies around the world, including decorated Catalina de Erauso, Ann Mills, and Dorothy Lawrence. They were bold and seemingly fearless, as their military records illustrate.

At the same time, men who dressed as women were perceived as deceitful and as lowering their station. Charles Edward Stuart, in 1745, supposedly dressed as Flora MacDonald's maidservant to escape having to serve for the Battle of Culloden. Peking Opera singer Shi Pei Pu dressed as a woman to elicit information from a French diplomat during the Cultural Revolution. Even Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy of the United States of America was rumored to have dressed as a woman to escape the pursuing armies of the Union.

To summarize, a woman dressing as a man was to be applauded. They masqueraded as men in order to elevate or gain stature or influence. On the other hand, a man dressing as a woman was to be looked on as demeaning, as they did so under the guise of fraud and deceit, and of negating their gender superiority.

Interesting.

In the modern era – the 20th and 21st centuries –women donning male-centric attire seems to hold little taboo (unless, of course, that woman portrays herself consistently in a very masculine manner). Women who simply prefer to wear jeans instead of skirts and dresses could all be considered crossdressers; bur the practice has become accepted as normal. For men, it has become more mainstream to take better care of their bodies (a la labeled a metrosexual).

In both instances, labels are still attached in order to make the acts better understood. Slap a label and a simple description on it, and people tend to grasp it a bit better. But neither of these examples has the stigma that the male crossdresser still encounters.

Throughout the ages, people have had a love affair with crossdressing in the entertainment industry. In the Far East (Kabuki) and Europe (Shakespeare), theater has enjoyed the portrayal of female characters by men. Some of this was due to the segregation of the sexes, but it does prove that there was an acceptance that men could dress as woman for theater.

This idea continued into the modern era. Milton Berle, Flip Wilson, and Benny Hill made careers out of parading around their stages as female characters. Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis used their feminine wiles in *Some Like It Hot* to hide from the mob, getting into hilarious misadventures with Marilyn Monroe. That was in 1959.

Were these men considered crossdressers? Not typically. As far as we know these performers did not take the art of crossdressing further than the hot spotlights in front of their audiences. They entertained us for laughs. Parody, not personal expression, drove these characters. As an audience, we can appreciate the performance of the character and the context of the story. I am fairly certain that their portrayals did not cast them into the category of crossdressers. From Danny Boyle to Dustin Hoffman, from Patrick Swayze to Tom Hanks, each was not saddled with the stigma of being a transgender minority male. Even conservative leaning Rudy Guiliani dressed as a woman for a cameo Broadway role.

But cast that character in real life as someone you love and you will not necessarily be as happy or as entertained. Sitcoms last 22 minutes, movies last 2 hours. Partnerships are supposed to last a lifetime.

TWO TRAINS LEAVE THE STATION AT...

Seriously, you might be thinking, that wasn't a very good history lesson. And you would be right. I had not intended to bore you with statistics, dates and personal profiles. No one ever memorizes all of those things (unless you have 3" x 5" index cards). I simply wanted to give you a taste that crossdressing has been around for a long time.

Women have masqueraded as men in order to affect change or live grander lives. Most have been exulted for their courage and valor. Men across the ages, from the 1400s to the late 1800s, have singularly hoarded all of the fineries of satins, silks and powdered wigs. Those aristocrats were looked up to and envied for their fashion and status (of wealth and station). Heck, even Greek and Roman men and women wore robes, and it wasn't even a college frat party.

As with almost all species and cultures, males and females dress to impress and to show off their attributes. It's all about defining what will enhance the attraction of another. As our society has matured and become more accepting of the blurring of fashion lines, women in western culture have been embraced for wearing masculine fashions. Men can be conscious and take more meticulous care of their bodies (being accepted in some more suburban and metropolitan areas). It is the crossdressing male that continues to suffer as a result of his quest for a more complete feminine expression.

Why do men want to express themselves as women, or in some obvious feminine way, if they are not considering a transition into womanhood or are not gay? Continue our journey, dear reader, and let's see if together we can discover more about what motivates the male crossdresser.

1.5. You Might Be A Crossdresser If...

I believe that we are here for each other, not against each other. Everything comes from an understanding that you are a gift in my life - whoever you are, whatever our differences.

~ John Denver

If you own a home with wheels on it and several cars without, you just might be a redneck.

~ Jeff Foxworthy

SPECTRUM

There is a vast spectrum of behaviors and personalities that are defined under the umbrella of crossdressing. Each person is driven by his (or her) own slant of what they are striving to emulate, feel, or experience. There rage huge debates – from society in general to the ostracism from our own Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Questioning (LGBTQ) community – as to where crossdressers should be classified; as well as whether we are simply a fetish group that serves to destabilize and debase the „more serious" transgender factions.

What follows is a small cross-section of crossdressing stereotypes. This is by no means a complete list. Many crossdressers may have occupied more than one type (or occupy more than one type at the same time) during their lives. I'll never understand the fascination of some of the types you will read about, nor will I ever find common ground to agree with these crossdressing men's reasons or motivations. My job is not to judge but to set the table and let you pick at what you would like to consume.

AVID READERS

I felt faint.

My freshly shaved skin tingled with the thought of wearing the lingerie that my wife had placed on the bed for me. The bra, panties, garters and stockings would look fantastic on any woman's figure...

Many love to escape to a make-believe world of femme fantasy fiction. There are many fan sites dedicated to fictional feminization. They cover all types of fetish writing topics, including forced feminization, caught with consequences, bad boy to good girl, mind control, and more. In fact, some writers are so prolific that they have created an entire fictional universe that they fill with multiple stories of fate, lust, and all things feminine. The stories can range from silly rated-G tales to sexually graphic XXX prose.

From TGstories.com to Literotica.com to Fictionmania.tv, the Internet is a hotbed for those who want to immerse themselves into the worlds of femme fiction. I read somewhere on Facebook that just one of these sites claimed over one million subscribers!

Some sites are dedicated to graphic novelization and the comic book format. There are amateur animations and more mainstream hentai (a subgenre of Japanese manga and animation that is characterized by overtly sexualized characters and sexually explicit images and plots). Eastern cultures celebrate transgender identities, transitioning characters, and

female cartoons characters with a little something extra much more than Western Cultures. In America, though, all you have to do is go to Amazon.com for proof of the dozens of entries of crossdressing erotica.

For men who are struggling with their gender identities, or girlfriends or wives who are on a desperate search for enlightenment about their crossdressing partners, a quick search for the word „crossdressing“ will quickly reinforce your preconceived notions that crossdressing is a fetish.

For Your Consideration ~

Many crossdressers enjoy the erotica that authors, graphic artists, and animators have created. It allows the crossdresser to escape to worlds where they don't have to take responsibility for who they are, where they can magically become a woman without the worry of permanence. You know, what most literature and entertainment is meant to do for the average Joe and Jane.

Isn't it pornography, you ask?

Some of it is, of course. Some of it is erotica. And some of it is just decent literature or filmmaking. I believe the downfall of pornography comes when the reader or watcher starts to insist that the worlds of make believe are what real life should be. It should be relegated to the realms of fantasy, not usurp reality.

FORCED FEMINIZATION

Forced feminization allows the man to be absolved from the responsibility of acknowledging their desires of crossdressing. If they are forced to do it, it's the dominant partner's responsibility for putting the crossdresser into that situation. The crossdresser is off the hook for being held responsible, able to maintain their masculinity with the thought that their feminization was beyond their control.

There are also many sites dedicated to forced feminization and forced femme makeovers. There exist comportment and sissy schools where dominant females make their clients become obedient maidservants for however long the client's Visa card has paid.

DRAG QUEENS AND KINGS

RuPaul is the most famous face of drag queens. The show she hosts, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, is what most people with basic cable or Internet access understand drag queens to be. He has been classic in his individuality and a proponent of establishing a counter-culture all his own.

But he is just one of many drag queens who have come before him. Other notable famous drag queens – including Divine, Dame Edna Everage, and Danny La Rue – have all made successful mainstream careers as drag entertainers.

One of the popular misconceptions about drag queens is that they are all gay. While I won't postulate supposed census percentages, many take on their female personas strictly as a form of self-exploration or performance art. Some look at their feminine facades as a statement of self-expression, whether for personal or public purposes.

While RuPaul represents the perfection of *high drag*, many others use „drag“ as part of their everyday life. Remember in the 80s and 90s when the emo Goth look was so prevalent? There were plenty of young men using eyeliner, mascara and lipstick as part of their look. That practice would be considered a form of drag by some standards.

And don't forget that women can also portray a masculine persona. Many female entertainers work as drag kings to emulate popular male stars like the late Elvis Presley or Michael Jackson. Others pursue careers as comedians or in performance troupes. Julie Andrews herself had a successful run on Broadway (and in the film) in the starring role in Victor/Victoria.

For Your Consideration ~

Why is it socially acceptable by both men and women that a woman emulates the masculine form, while a man doing the same for the feminine form is frowned upon? We see heterosexual women, everyday, dressed in masculine clothing, for the office or for comfort. In fact, it is much more acceptable for women to dress in male cut clothing and wear their hair in a more severe male style cut.

Katherine Hepburn is a wonderful example of the modern woman, before it was acceptable to be so. She was a fierce independent woman who shocked America with her non-conforming practice of wearing pants. Nowadays, most women wear pants, leggings, or stretch jeans and nobody pays them any mind.

Annie Lenox, the famous international singer and artist, made a habit of wearing short pixie hair and very masculine attire. She was and is considered an amazing talent and a fashion innovator, not a crossdresser.

DRESS AND RELEASE

There is a cross-section (no pun intended) of men who dress for one reason, and one reason only. How shall I put this? They like to get all dolled up as a pretty princess so that they can have a happily-ever-after... dress as a sexy secretary so that they can take a final dictation for the day... put on a French Maid uniform so that they can dust off the stove pipe. If you still are confused by my analogies, let me be more straightforward. Some crossdressing men dress solely for the purpose of masturbation.

Whatever the article of clothing – whether just a pair of panties, pantyhose, or a more complete ensemble – these men love to feel and see what they are wearing. They love to imagine themselves as a woman that would wear these clothes. Those sometimes taboo feelings and thoughts of femininity excite them and drive them to... take care of business south of the border. After the act is complete and the excitement subsides, those feelings are typically replaced with a sense of shame. The man would want to clean up, undress, and put those bad things away where they found them or keep them hidden.

For Your Consideration ~

If a boy discovers crossdressing during adolescence and puberty, it can easily become part of their self-pleasure routine. The desire to become a female with the aid of the

chosen clothing, in and of itself is a sensual and forbidden experiment. Looking in the mirror and seeing that emerging female façade creates butterflies and sexual tension. If these boys had a proclivity to sexual release primarily through the act of feminine dressing, they can fall into repeated feminine dressing as an adulthood fetish. If a boy crossdresses prior to their sexual self-discovery during puberty, then it was not the only driver for their eventual sexual identity.

CROSSPLAY / COSPLAY

The term cosplay mean „costume play". It is not torrid. It is the activity or practice of dressing up as a character from a work of fiction (such as a comic book, video game, literature, or television show). The act has become more mainstream as people have embraced comics and sci-fi as part of pop culture.

Crossplay is defined as dressing in a costume as the opposite sex. In these cases, a man dresses as an established female character such as Wonder Woman and Ms. Marvel or gender-bending a traditionally male character into a female Joker or a Ms. Punisher (although these characters already exist in the DC and Marvel universe, respectively... don't get me started 'cause I could geek out all day about it!).

I have dressed as some of my favorite male and female comic superheroes. I have even coaxed my girlfriend into dressing as a heroine or villain or antiheroine for the last few comic book conventions. Score! She looks amazing every year!

The practice started initially as people dressed as their favorite Japanese anime or manga character, and has grown faster than a speeding bullet into all segments of pop culture (Dr. Who, Star Trek, Star Wars, Marvel, DC, and more!). I have seen many girls dress up as any of a number of Doctors from the Doctor Who series. Are they considered crossdressers? No! They just love the characters so much they want to honor them.

My girlfriend told me that she felt different and empowered as the character she was dressed as. It was strange for some people to see Spider-Man's Black Cat walk down a New York City sidewalk, but my girlfriend pulled it off in grand fashion.

I also walked down the same street dressed in a black bodysuit with a lightning bolt emblazoned on my ample chest, with long blond hair, a mask, long gloves and thigh high boots with five-inch heels. At that moment, I was not Savannah but the character I had chosen to emulate. It was less about crossdressing and took on a different form of artistic expression. I was paying homage to that character and wanted to do all I could to respect her.

Interestingly, I have found myself shying away from cosplaying male characters up until recent years. I always felt more comfortable as a female character, even though it takes a lot of work to emulate the female form (with padding, breast forms, and corsetry). I actually have found that I have a skewed sense of self as a man, thinking that I am physically inadequate.

For Your Consideration ~

People come in all shapes and sizes – tall, thin, short, and stocky – and many want to dress up as their favorite character. Regardless of a specific body shape, remember that comic books have exaggerated the human form for years and most proportions are

unattainable. If people want to pay homage to their favorite character in their own artistic way, please remember that it takes confidence and courage to dress up, and to own their portrayal with their heads held high.

ESCAPE ARTISTS

Life is stressful. It's a rat race. The corporate world is dog-eat-dog. Like Rick Springfield sang, *I'm working hard, I don't know why, I'm like a working class dog, and I just get by*. The only two things guaranteed in life are death and taxes.

Many of us come home from a hard day of work. I know this is not a purely masculine concept, especially in the new millennium. I have seen strong women, one in particular who works a full career while raising three children, endure as much, if not more, stress than many men. But I must speak of the men for this type of crossdresser.

Some men have a need to come home after an especially stressful 12 to 14-hour workday and dress in something pretty. There is not necessarily a sexual component as described in the Dress and Release section above. What occurs is a subtle shift in cognitive reality. While embodying the same body, the act of dressing as a woman allows the man to be like Alice in Wonderland. He can escape down the rabbit hole into a land of make believe.

Comforted by the tight confining pantyhose and soft cashmere sweater – maybe with full makeup and wig, maybe not – the man becomes a woman who does not share the same problems as her male counterpart. Johnny Depp, in Tim Burton's semi-biographical film *Ed Wood*, illustrated this concept better than I can explain it. For an hour or an evening, the female persona can stride around to wash dishes, watch television, or go for a walk or drive without ever considering or worrying about the outstanding dilemmas of his day-to-day life.

Why can't these people just relieve stress the old-fashioned way? You know, going for a jog or working out?

For Your Consideration ~

You may believe it unlikely that an article of clothing can change how you think. According to some studies, clothing can affect how you feel about yourself, in general.

Most crossdressers may not even know why the act of crossdressing makes them calmer and more at ease. But since they have a desire to dress in the first place, the stress of not dressing may cause more tension. Putting on a blouse and skirt allows them to feel complete, letting them approach something close to normalcy, as far as they understand it. Crossdressers who deny their needs will tend to feel off when forced to curb their behavior to the conformities of what is considered acceptable.

For both men and women, ask yourself... when you change into baggy tops, jeans or an oversized sweatshirt at the end of the day, aren't you comforted by them? Weren't you desperate to slip into those clothes that represented relaxation? The world hasn't changed. The situations and stresses of the days haven't gone away. But, wearing the comfy clothes somehow changed your perception of the events.

EXPERIMENTERS

There will always be men who just want to engage in the act of dressing in women's lingerie or panties as an exhilarating experiment in the bedroom with their partners. This is not something that will necessarily become a fetish or a gateway moment leading to full-blown crossdressing (or worse, in the female partner's fearful eyes, transitioning to womanhood). Of course, only a man who is comfortable with this type of exploration of the feminine will be likely to participate.

Be advised that men are not always the ones to bring up this idea for bedroom play. Female partners have been known to bring it up to their men, whether as a scenario to humiliate, dominate or feminize their spouse/partner. Also know, ladies, that most men want to please their women (and happen to enjoy sex, too!) and would be agreeable to most bedroom play if approached in the right way.

For Your Consideration ~

Remember that communication with your partner is the most important tool in your relationship toolbox. We are all filled with some degree of fear and expectations as it comes to our needs and desires. We assume our partners will react a certain way to us based on our own expectations and experience.

Communication is a skill to be developed. To whatever degree you can master this verbal art form, it will allow you to clothe yourself in honesty about what you consider important to your own growth and well-being.

Bedroom play is not the only place that men may want to explore their femininity without a deeper motivation in place. It is said that Halloween is the crossdressers' Christmas, the one night of the year that a man can explore his feminine side under public scrutiny and be able to explain it away as parody or art. Yes, it is true that crossdressers have used Halloween to introduce their feminine sides to the world. Most men, however, simply dress up as a female character for fun or as part of a gender-bending couple's costume concept.

For More of Your Consideration ~

Why do some girls and women dress up as slutty nurses, sexy witches, and more? Is it because that is what the costume manufacturers and society have dictated for us? Halloween is a holiday to abandon that who you are in favor of a persona more exaggerated or opposite than what we consider normal.

I do not recall there being a problem or stray thought the next day when a female office mate decided to dress up as Charlie Chaplin. But if a man dressed as Marilyn Monroe at the same office party, there could be some whispering about his motivations. Stigma exists that the man must be gay or a crossdresser (and they just don't know it yet!) if they present themselves successfully as the „weaker" sex.

PRINCESSES, BRIDES, FAIRIES, AND MORE

Princesses, brides, secretaries, maids, and fairies show up on the same list. What do they represent and have in common? What was the list originally asking for? Will Alex Trebek famously ask you to put your answer in the form of a question? Give up?

I will not keep you in suspense any longer, dear reader. For the crossdresser, the above list represents the same thing it does for most young girls, power or ultimate femininity.

But wait, Savannah, being a secretary or a maid was never on my little girl list of what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wanted to be the first female president!

Yes. You are right, of course. The list is an exaggeration of femininity based on what we have come to accept as the social norm for women. As far as we have come in equality between the sexes, there is still a divide that traditionally separates men and women. Expectations still rule most thinking.

Women still are expected to wear an expensive white flowing dress on their wedding day. My girlfriend, however, is through with the whole concept. Once is enough! Some little girls still want Disney Princess dresses to wear around the house (and sometimes to the grocery store with mom). Accessorizing with sparkled wings and a wand lets the little girl soar as high as her imagination allows.

But you haven't properly answered my question, Savannah!

I know.

Yes, I presented secretaries and maids as part of my list. And I will answer the question with a question. Why do most little girls gravitate toward Fisher Price kitchen sets, Barbie Dream Houses, and Disney Princesses? Sure, you could say that it's about the massive push for advertising, but the marketing is geared that way because it works! Focus groups and marketing research has proven that little girls want what they want just like little boys want what they want. Girls want dolls and boys want Legos (I love, love, love my Legos!) So what does that all mean?

All it means to a crossdresser is that there are typically female dominated roles that, as a man, we cannot fulfill. *Leave it to Beaver's* June Cleaver cleaned the house and prepared family dinners in her dress and pearls. Women have the honor of walking down the aisle in a white satin and lace wedding gown.

Some crossdressers want to emulate these female roles. Stepping into these stereotypes gives them that feeling of femininity, triggering synopses in their brain through tactile memory and wish fulfillment to believe themselves to be a woman. Men could never be brides. But as their feminine self, they can become one through the simple act of donning the attire.

For Your Consideration ~

There is a fine line between being engulfed in the experience of the bride, the maid, the housewife or the secretary, and being drawn to, for example, the PVC or rubber-clad French maid as a fetish. Ladies, if your partner is engaged almost exclusively in one of these femme personas, please start the dialogue to discuss his motivations. While crossdressers and fetishists share some similar feminine fantasies and wish fulfillments, the non-fetish crossdresser typically gravitates toward more appropriate clothing for

private and public use while the fetishist will be found in their attire of choice regardless of the event or situation.

SYBIL DRESSERS

Remember that television movie, *Sybil*? Sally Fields portrayed a woman with multiple personalities; each not aware of the others packed into her mindscape. Each existed as a fracture of Sybil's psyche, there to protect her main identity. *Some of it seems like medical hokum*, you might say. I am not here to speculate the validity of medical science or documented cases.

I am here to tell you that, like in the Escape Artists section, there is a distinct shift in thinking for some crossdressers when dressed. For myself, I have more confidence to dance! Yes, as silly as it may sound, I am very self-conscious about my dancing abilities as a man (I know, hard to believe!). But let me get on my LBD and knee length boots – and put on that song that makes me squeal, "That's my jam!" – and I'm racing to the dance floor to shake my *groove thang*. And, yes, dear reader, I can move pretty well in my favorite 4-inch heels.

But enough about me.

There are some men who dress to de-stress, letting the cares of the workday and the rat race slip away as they slide on their favorite pair of pantyhose. They go about their business, whatever that may be when they dress, enjoying the escape, comfort, and distance that their dressing persona provides. But there are others who have a female identity, in part, out of necessity to protect themselves from the rigors, turmoil, and torment that they have suffered in their male lives. Whether it is from mental or physical abuse as a youth or from a lifetime of denial or depression, the female persona can serve as a dissociative identity for the man. The man can be gruff and unhappy, while the female side is more reserved and content. Where the male side is quick to anger, the female persona is patient and cool. It does seem strange that the clothes would make the difference, but the feminine things for these crossdressing men are the catalysts to invoke the comforting half... the desired half... the better half. Like Billy Batson speaking the word *Shazam!* to become the super-powered Captain Marvel, these men become the women, in mind and spirit, to combat and quell the voices and instincts they grew up with.

For Your Consideration ~

Just because the crossdressing male uses his female persona to become a softer, well-adjusted and balanced individual (both physically and mentally) it doesn't mean that he wants to transition to the opposite sex. Femininity can be an escape and a method of presentation of an elusive intangible quality that only Gaia (Mother Earth) would understand.

THE TACTILE-TICIAN

What does this somewhat made up term mean to me? Yeah, I made it up. I couldn't find it in the urban dictionary anywhere. Based on the Latin word tactilis, to be tactile is to be connected to the sense of touch.

So what?

Well, women have it so much better than men in the general clothing department. They have so much more variety in the workplace, while their male counterparts get to wear a suit... or, maybe, a suit. What a choice! If it is a business casual environment, men get to wear dress pants and a dress shirt... maybe even [gasp] a Polo shirt. Wow! Of course, if I had all sorts of money and better fashion sense, I would have access to finer materials.

The crossdresser craves soft things, shiny and smooth things, the feel of a soft material that slides across the skin, clings in the right places, caresses and compresses like a tight cocoon. Women who wear pantyhose for work can't wait to strip them off when they get home. The crossdressing man longs to keep these items on, to feel them on his body. Some of it may be due to the infrequency of their ability to dress, but the feeling of shaving our legs, drying off and slipping on a pair of pantyhose or stockings is an utterly exhilarating exercise. The way the air flows across the fabric and skin as we walk, the way the fabric encases our limbs, the way the nylon feels when we stroke (get your mind out of the gutter, ladies and gentlemen!) our hands along our thighs and calves.

Because there is an expectation of women to wear certain articles, I personally believe that some have lost that loving feeling about wearing those clothes. For most ladies, clothing has become a utilitarian process of adornment and disrobing. Somewhat lost is the art of *becoming*. Yes, I believe that with time some have forgotten about the sensations of the fabrics worn. My girlfriend picks out blouses and tops because she loves the way they feel through her fingers. But once purchased and worn a few times, does she consciously continue to take a moment to appreciate what she is wearing? Jen says, „yes." Does she stop to look in the mirror to realize the power of her clothing? Jen says, „Realize the power of what I am wearing? Nope!"

Crossdressing men continue to appreciate the clothes they select and wear. For the crossdressing male, clothing has power. A pair of pantyhose encases the legs, making them feel more feminine and shimmery. A satin top is soft and slick, evoking a sensual wrap of protection. A skirt or a dress, unique to women in modern society (except those Scotsmen's kilts), screams out its womanly roots!

For Your Consideration ~

If you're a partner of a crossdressing man, do yourself (and your partner) a favor and be a part of their ritualistic process of becoming their female personas. I understand that it may be difficult to see your partner in the various levels of completion. I understand to see him without makeup or hair while he already has a blouse and skirt on may be disconcerting and somewhat off-putting. It can be visually strange and foreign.

Try to keep a level of objectivity and watch his process of becoming. Of course, crossdressing males will have various degrees of practice and knowledge as it comes to make-up application and selection. So, the process may take a while. But watch how he treats his body and the care and effort he puts into the process. Pantyhose, hip and butt

padding, corsetry and body briefers, tucking of the nether region, breast forms of some sort, the outer clothing, the make-up application, the wig (if needed), and the shoes.

I heard from one woman that she „was resentful" that her husband took „over an hour to get ready", while she „was ready in 15 minutes". What she realized is that she had lost the appreciation for the clothing she wore and for the process of becoming. Her husband's dressing had „shamed her" into paying more attention to her own femininity.

We crossdressing males can be fixated on the perfection of female identities and our presentation. We forget that women, having had to live a certain way their entire life, may take their own femininity for granted. Just like men take their manhood for granted.

These are strange days, indeed.

THE GIRLS NEXT DOOR

If I had to put a label on myself – and I must state that I truly hate labels, both as it applies to our identities and how other people feel they need to bucket us – I would see myself in this category. Even though I have found myself in different categories over the years as I have traveled my road of self-discovery and balance (more on that later on in My Story), I see myself as just a man trying to have a normal life while becoming Savannah from time to time.

I call this group the Girls Next Door because of what the name implies. The Girl Next Door is perceived as approachable, dependable, and trustworthy. They are an archetype of a kind and unassuming woman that you are drawn to. That is all I want.

What do you want?

I want to become Savannah and be able to walk out the front door without worry of judgment or scorn from others. I tend to want to go to mainstream establishments (Starbucks, Outback Steakhouse, etc.). I try to blend in as a passable woman, not because I worry that I will be found out but because I want to enjoy life just like any other person. I try to carry myself with confidence, radiating a smile and positivity to disarm anyone that may give me stares of novelty or disdain.

The Girls Next Door strive to be stylish without being garish (unless the event calls for it... we are always up for a challenge!). If you saw them in a restaurant or on the street, you would probably have to take a second look to decide whether they were men or women. They take utmost care with their presentation and are comfortable in their skin as a woman without being completely overt with their sexuality. Trust me, we want to be as sexy as we can, but we have advanced to a more mature (not matronly – never that!) style that is alluring, practical, and appropriate for the occasion.

What could be more enjoyable than a nice evening out with friends and my girlfriend? Whether at a bar or in a club setting, a coffee shop, lounge or restaurant, I am happiest when I am validated as a true individual. I am not validated as a woman because people openly accept and embrace who I am (that I reserve for my girlfriend); I am validated when I am out and no one seems to care or shoot a second look my way. Acceptance in society for me, in particular, is when they treat me like everyone else. In NYC, that acceptance comes in the form of indifference – haha!

For Your Consideration ~

Ladies, imagine a life where walking out from under the shadows of the front porch portico or from behind a rising garage door always has the opportunity to be met with scorn and hatred from the general populace because of how we are classified. We are a different lot from many in the LGBTQ community because we are more fluid in our gender. Where most on the community party list are striving for acceptance as a single gender identity, the non-transitioning crossdresser continually slides between their male and female personas.

Do you want to stay a man or become a woman?

If you only dress as a woman on occasion, you must not be very serious about it.

Crossdressers are still misunderstood as a gender group by the masses and by other transgender and transsexual groups. Most crossdressers are not looking to change their biology. They are not masquerading as woman to bait men into a torrid relationship. Because crossdressers do not follow defined rules set for other transgender or transsexual groups, they are considered an anomaly.

The problem comes in the secrecy that still surrounds our kind. While many gays, lesbians and transitioning men and women are emerging and being accepted, crossdressers are a mostly hidden faction still considered to be fetishists and part timers.

TRANSVESTIC FETISHISM

The people diagnosed – also a pet peeve of mine as science and the medical field continuously consider many of us crossdressers as suffering from one of many disorders – with Transvestic Fetishism must include two key criteria. The first is that the individual (man or woman) must be sexually aroused by the act of crossdressing. The second is that the individual must experience significant distress or impairment (at work, socially, privately, in their relationships, etc.) as a result of their behavior.

Types of fetishism include, but are not limited to, persons that collect specific types of lingerie, stockings or pantyhose, bridal gowns, sissy dresses, and the like in order to achieve sexual climax and satisfaction. They have more of an obsessive-compulsive need to dress in a very specific way to gain a very specific result.

Please be aware that Transvestic Fetishism is different from the pre-adolescent crossdressing boy who is discovering her as hormones rage during his sexual awakening, or the adult male who suddenly finds himself attracted to women's clothing for the first time. These examples of *new girls* are trying to understand their identity and will most likely be initially sexually aroused by the experience. Only those who dress strictly for the desire of arousal would be designated into the category of Transvestic Fetishism.

INFANTS, BABY GIRLS, AND SISSIES

There are some men who like to regress to a child-like state of innocence. Some like to wear diapers under their male clothing. I have seen men who seem to enjoy the risk of being discovered in public by having the diaper's edges on display. Maybe they enjoy how the diapers feel. Maybe they are looking for that vague primal tactile sensation from their infancy.

Some like to dress in frilly panties and petticoats with bows in their hair, acting like little pre-adolescent girls or their approximation of what they think little girls should act like. There is sometimes a regression to a simpler era when dresses and proper childish comportment was expected.

BEARDED LADIES

Like the infants and sissies in the previous section, this group's motivation is also foreign to me. Men who dress as women but do not try to hide their facial hair are sometimes labeled as genderqueer. They don't conform to conventional gender distinctions, but identify with neither or a combination of male and female genders. They take on the attributes of both sexes in an amalgam for their presentation. I guess the Bearded Lady at the early and mid-20th century sideshows could have been considered genderqueer, as well.

I can only share a single personal experience. During a private transgender event, I noticed a bearded man in a satin evening gown. In a sad irony, I found that his persona put me off because he *offended* my sensibilities as to what a transgender male should be. Maybe the beard was not part of what he wanted as his feminine personae? Maybe, in his home life, the shaving of the beard would have been too shocking and raise too many eyebrows?

There could be one of a dozen reasons why this individual chose to wear both a dress and facial hair. I will never know his true intent. I felt bad that I rushed to judgment about him without knowing more about him. As he moves forward on his own journey, I can only hope to wish him well.

For Your Consideration ~

Crossdressing men may keep from taking their female presentation to the fullest degree because they're concerned about what others may think or say about them as men. For example, some crossdressers detest the hair on their body because it keeps them from being able to wear more revealing clothing, but keep from manscaping because friends or co-workers may ask why they do so.

Some partners see the deconstruction of what they consider male as a warning sign of the ghosts of transitioning future. Shaving one's body could be considered a gateway to other, more permanent, body changes. Partners may worry that they will be forced to defend against questions about our appearance and behavior by friends and family.

And don't forget, crossdressers, most partners don't really want to run up against your prickly body three days after you have shaved or see their man with less hair than them. Many women find it hard to see a smooth shaved man because they equate masculinity with body hair. Body hair + Man = Normal

Be mindful of both perspectives!

LAND OF CONFUSION

Now I am more confused than I was at the beginning of reading this chapter, you groan. Thanks for nothing, Ms. Hauk!

I know. I know.

The reality of the situation you find yourself in, as a crossdresser or a partner of a crossdresser, is that there is a vast gender identity spectrum out there that has been generalized and boiled down to the simple label of crossdressing or the more clinical medical description transvestism.

If you imagine the Empire State Building in the heart of Manhattan, each floor could be seen as a type of crossdressing or transgender expression. The subways and garages are on the lowest levels, maybe to represent the closeted and private fetishists since they are very much still considered the community underground.

Then you hop on the escalator to the main concourses where the glitzy shops serve as an analogy for the flamboyant and over-the-top drag queens and high art performers. Now that you are done shopping, you figure you better get to work on the 18th floor. Most people have little idea what corporations and companies operate in the leased office spaces throughout the building. They operate fairly autonomously and under the radar because it's just business as usual for the typical non-fetish, non-transitioning crossdressing male.

But what about the observation deck, Savannah. Isn't that where every crossdresser wants to go?

That is a great question... and fear.

The average crossdresser aims to perfect their craft of feminine illusion. We do the best we can with the makeup skills we learn, the corsets and padding we can buy, and the fashions we can acquire. Sure, we dream a fantasy where, for a moment, we imagine stepping out onto the observation deck as a fully realized and accepted woman, but I'm not willing to pay those prices to ride the elevator up to the top floor every day. Heck no! I enjoy my duality of being able to operate in life as a man (for most of the time) and as a woman (when the feeling strikes).

I like my parts just the way they are, thank you very much!

So, if you like your parts that God gave you at birth, why do you feel the need to crossdress as a woman in the first place?

Let's try to figure that out together, my dear reader.

1.6. Why We Do It

For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‚If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been ‚No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

~ Steve Jobs

INTRODUCTION

Why do we do it?

It's an age-old question that most crossdressers started asking when they first realized that they were not like everyone else. But what is it to be like everyone else?

People who crossdress cover all nationalities, ethnicities, religions, economic classes, and has been reported (not sure how) to affect one out of every ten men. They can be the pizza delivery guy, your mail courier, your doctor, judges, and senators... your partner.

I can describe the need to crossdress by comparing it to a crying baby and their security blanket. Yes, dear readers, we crossdressers are just a bunch of babies! Wink! Seriously, though, think about a toddler who is dropped into a new location. They are out of place and scared. They start fidgeting and crying, unable to process the feelings of disconnect, fear and stress. But if you give them their favorite blanky (that's a blanket for all the singles out there), they calm down and are comforted by its familiar texture, smell, and softness. You will find the child with its arms wrapped around that blanket with nary a care in the world.

The urge to crossdress is something altogether different but yet the same as the example of the security blanket. Whatever the root reasons is to why we have the urge to dress, the result is that we are comforted by the feelings we get when we do so. It is transformative to our state of mind. I won't say that the act of dressing changes the chemicals in our brain, but I will say that it does shift our perceptions in some measure.

When I grew up, it was very evident in our household that it was frowned upon for a boy to want to play with his sister's Barbie dolls. But it was certainly okay to play with the 12" (again, keep your minds out of the gutter, please) Adventure Team Commander GI Joe action figure. If we started calling Dream House Barbie an action figure, would it be okay for boys to play with them?

Boys play with trucks, jeeps and toy guns; girls play with dolls, wear princess dresses, and cook in their Easy Bake ovens. Sure, we are hard-wired to want certain things. I know of a four-year-old girl who begged her parents for a plastic stacked washer and dryer set for Christmas. The parents were puzzled but bought the item as one of their daughter's gifts from Santa. Was that request based on the fact that the little girl wanted to emulate what she saw her mother do? If a little boy were to make that same request, would it have been granted?

In today's child rearing, what is considered traditional and gender-specific social norms? I understand that the modern parent is more educated and aware of gender identification and preference, even as it affects children as young as three or four-years-old. But in my era (I'm a Gen X-er, I will leave it at that) there was no World Wide Web to educate our parents about a

young boy who has an attraction to wearing his sister's clothes. Anything we did find out about crossdressing was considered forbidden underground erotica, fetish, and taboo.

How could we consider ourselves normal in the face of what information or support was available? Wait... I think I may have walked off on a tangent. Let's get to back to the question of why do we do it.

Let's try this again.

The asking of the question at all is to assume that the question needs to be answered. Is it the crossdresser's job to explain to you why he is the way he is, especially when he most likely will not fully understand the reasons why himself? Will any answer satisfy the question of the root cause?

Is an answer required because the crossdresser is not considered normal and, because of that, his condition needs to have an explanation in order for those around him to be able to cast a defense around it? Are crossdressers not normal? I didn't realize that. I always felt normal, but thank you for letting me know.

So there is a cure for me, then?

If we look back into the history of fashion we can see that our Founding Fathers all wore dapper clothing, knee socks and white powdered wigs. Royalty, throughout the ages, is depicted in drawings and paintings as being draped in satins, silks and other fineries, powdered faces and wigs that could be considered close to the modern interpretation of what male cross-dressing is. And if I ran into William Wallace and his Celtic broadsword from *Braveheart*, I don't think I would point out the absurdity of his kilt.

They can take our kilts, but they can't take our manhood!

I'm paraphrasing, of course.

For me, it goes back to the idea that the clothing makes the man or woman. Who decides what is socially acceptable... that men only wear suits and women only wear dresses? I see plenty of women wearing jeans and pants at work and at home. I guess they are all crossdressing females. I didn't realize I was in such good company!

I am being sarcastic, of course, but I do feel there is a severe double standard when it comes to the acceptability of clothing. I mean, there are entire lines of clothing made for women geared toward the idea of *borrowing the boyfriend's shirt* or boy short underwear. Even the limited fashion men do have has been commandeered by woman's fashion! Other than the Speed-o swim trucks, I can't think of any current fashion that slants a feminine style to male clothing other than more fashionable colors and some fabrics.

But, Savannah! We're not talking about speedos and kilts! We're talking about our husbands and boyfriends wearing our bras and panties and using our makeup to look like a woman!

Thank you, dear reader, for bringing me back to the topic at hand. Based on the types of crossdressers discussed earlier (and I know I only scratched the surface of the entire crossdressing spectrum), there are a few reasons that men have a desire to dress as the fairer sex. One, they find that dressing as a woman provides an escape from their version of reality. Two, some are trying to fulfill a part of their psyche with the physical expression of femininity.

Lastly, some use the sexuality of dressing as a means to fulfill a fantasy and experience a sexual high. There are many more reasons, to be sure. All I can hope is to bring illumination to the whys of the non-transitioning non-fetish crossdresser. There is obviously an urge to dress that needs to be addressed.

It is a highly sensual experience, if not a completely sexual one. The act of focusing on the clothes and how they feel on the body, the way the makeup changes our male appearance, the act of becoming is highly sensual. It is a sensory experience that takes in all of the senses over the entire body, not just the erogenous zone between our legs.

Crossdressing boys may have gravitated to their mother's or sister's bureaus or dressers. The fabrics and the articles themselves fascinated them. They wondered what it would feel like to put on a pair of underwear, a slip or pair of dress heels. It didn't matter that the clothing or shoes were too big. It only mattered how the clothing felt through their fingers, how the clothing felt on them, and how wearing the clothing made them feel. There could be physical excitement before and during the experience. There may have been regret or shame afterward, either because of being in a place that is considered off-limits or the taboo of the act.

As an adult, introduction to the world of crossdressing can come in many forms. An urge component is involved. Sometimes a crossdressing male is introduced to the life by coaxing or accident. Sometimes (like what you hear when watching episodes of *Criminal Minds*) there is a stressor event. And sometimes a man just stops denying those urges that had been suppressed from a lifetime of shame and mainstream non-acceptance.

I have a close crossdressing friend, Victoria, that may never have realized her true nature if it hadn't been for a former cis-girlfriend asking her to try on a pair of panties as something to spice up their love life. Since the act of crossdressing was supportive inside the relationship, it became normal for them. They eventually broke up, unfortunately, but those acts inside the relationship prompted Victoria to better understand his new urges. That first pair of panties led to a second (and more), providing the first steps upon a path of self-discovery.

He now lives with a foot (or heel) in both worlds. He is comfortable with having both a male and female identity. He lives and works as his male self, and gets dressed up as Victoria when he has extra time to go to the mall, into the city, or just to lounge around the house.

And do you know what makes him sad? The simple fact that there is still a huge divide in America where it seems almost impossible to believe that he could find and have a relationship with a cisgender woman who would accept and support who he is as both a man and a woman.

He did use social media to make a subtle proclamation of who she is. He put it out there for the digital world to see. The people who actually read Facebook posts instead of just looking at the pictures have been accepting of *her*.

So what have we learned?

Are we enlightened about why men like to dress as women?

According to varying reports (and, of course, I am scratching my wigged head in wonder as to how the forthcoming statistic was captured in census format), there could be up to 150

million transgender persons in the world. Of course, that statistic puts all trans-related persons in the same bucket. And since crossdressers are probably the most secretive (alright... I'll say it... the most 'in the closet') of the community, I find it unlikely that a true cross-section could have been allotted; that the reported numbers are lower than the true count.

At the end of the day, the reasons for why we crossdress may never be satisfactory to our friends, our family, our partners or even us. It's like if we finally found out how the dead returned to life in George Romero's classic film, *The Night of the Living Dead*. If we knew for sure it was a result of the space satellite named Wormwood, would we be satisfied with the root cause? How many of you were up in arms with how *Lost* ended?

The point is that understanding the whys is, many times, not helpful to our partners. The explanation would be heard, but may not truly understood. Can anyone who is not gay understand the psychology of why a man is attracted to a man or a woman to a woman? Can a *normie* or civilian understand the alcoholic mind? I can walk a mile in my partner's heels, but she will still roll her eyes wondering why I want to keep them on all night while she would have taken them off in the first half-hour of the wedding reception.

Each crossdressing man's motivations are as individualized as grains of sand on a beach. Unless there is a battery of therapy in which we truly open ourselves up for inspection, many of us will never know the reasons why we have a need to dress. And because every crossdresser's journey is different – each a result from a mix of psychology, experience, genetics, environment and other drivers – there is no pat answer. Not in this book or any book.

IN CLOSING

All I can ask of you, dear loving and supportive partner is to listen to your man's story and ask questions in an honest and open way (trying to keep judgment and fear from the questions you ask and the answers you hear). I understand this discovery and the learning process can be of the utmost difficulty. The situation is just as difficult for the crossdresser. There is a human need to anticipate possible future threats. We know the dynamics of the relationship has changed. How you think about our gender will never be the same.

The bell has been rung. And that bell can't be unrung. You are filled with fear. So are we. That is truly something that both the crossdresser and their partner share.

We fear your rejection. We fear that you will cast us out for the human beings you have discovered we are, reinforcing the belief that we are freaks of nature – something to be feared and treated with disgust. Something abnormal, something debased, something filled with perversion.

You are afraid that we encompass all those things I just mentioned. You fear that if we have lied about this part of our life, what else have we kept from you? You fear that this discovery is a gateway moment that will lead to us wanting to become a woman full-time or to become attracted to men. The world you have built and have grown accustomed to is on the verge of collapse.

But is it? Is your world about to implode? Is that the truth? Yes, something of a serious nature has fundamentally changed between the two of you. There is no mistake about that. I

am not absurd enough to try to dissuade you of that fact. But this discovery does not have to be a death sentence.

It will take work. It will take humility and understanding. It will take a concerted effort from your crossdresser to not be defensive or feel a sense of entitlement. Remember, crossdresser, that your partner is a brand new visitor to a world in which you have lived all your life (or a significant part of it).

Be open. Be honest. Be supportive and understanding. Clean away the thorns and underbrush from the past and start rebuilding that solid foundation between the two of you. Crossdressers, you have to be as understanding and supportive of your spouse as you hope her to be of you.

Partners, start asking questions of your crossdressing man.

What questions? I'm in such shock right now that I can't think of anything to ask beyond, ‚Are you gay?'.

Ok. So I will get you started with a slow-pitch softball lob easy question... ahem... Hun, how long have you being dressing this way?

1.7. Lifers And Late Bloomers

I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. And when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice. But still, the place you live in is that much more grey.

~ Ellis „Red" Redding from *The Shawshank Redemption*

REALIZATIONS

Some crossdressing men, like me, have been dressing since we were very young, realizing we were different as early as five or six-years-old. That is not to say that we stopped identifying as a boy in favor of wanting to be a girl. We just started to feel an attraction to the clothing of the opposite sex, even before there was an understanding of a possible sexual component.

On the other end of the spectrum is the group of men who realized their crossdressing tendencies only in adulthood. For these men, their discovery of wanting to dress in feminine attire usually surfaces well into their twenties. If this is not the case, there is usually a stressor or some act that introduces crossdressing to them.

THE LIFERS

The man who I am designating the Lifer found the allure of feminine clothing at an early pre-adolescent age. Whether from an inkling of self-discovery (sneaking into mom's room to see what treasures awaited in her dresser drawer) or stemming from an experience brought on by a friend or family member (sisters thought it would be hilarious to dress their little brother in their old dresses), these boys discovered that wearing feminine clothing was interesting and enjoyable. They found comfort in the clothing. It just *felt* right.

I'm sure they were getting off on the experience!

That comment is an adult concept. Even in this modern digital era, where we are bombarded with information and stimuli, a child wouldn't typically think about gender identities in the way an adult does. An example to illustrate this is when a little boy tries on mom's dress heels because his big sister is parading around in another pair. Other than environmental exposures (family life, television, etc.), children don't think about their gender in the same terms as adults. Many times, parents project their own life experiences, fears and stigmas onto their children's behavior. A boy doesn't know that he is not supposed to wobble around in mom's shoes. The innocence and wonder children enjoy – and that adults envy – should allow for the discovery of one's self. An individual will gravitate to their true nature, if given enough latitude and underlying support.

But I don't want my child to be a crossdresser.

Please remember that all little boys who dress up in girl clothes or shoes at playtime do not all have a want to crossdress. As a parent, though, would you force your child to write right-handed if you found them trying to scrawl their names in block letters with a crayon with their left? Social acceptability and standards are inflicted on us at an early age, even if we try to embrace that which makes us different.

As crossdressing boys, we have an inherent understanding that we need to keep our adventures to ourselves. The need for secrecy stems from the fact that we have been told that we shouldn't be rifling through other family members' dresser drawers – that mommy and daddy's room is off-limits. If our sister decided to dress us up in their Disney Princess dresses as part of our playtime together and everyone thinks its cute, we may be more open to sharing with others inside the family unit. But if we are shamed or made fun of while participating with our siblings, we quickly realize we need to veil our enthusiasm and to find the act as inappropriate and unacceptable.

Hence the roots of the stigma take hold. As crossdressing children, we become adept at keeping this component of our lives separate from others. We steal moments when we find ourselves alone, frantically dressing in mom's dressy heels (that she never wears anymore), her girdles and slips, or in our big sister's leotards, swimsuits or other desirables.

As we grow into adolescence and puberty, the sexual component arrives. Our hormones rage and we start to understand the physical differences between boys and girls. Our erupting attraction for girls compounds our need to dress and to become that desirable feminine self. There are reports and studies that state that adolescent crossdressing self-promotes its need on the individual.

How so?

As a teenager, while those aforementioned boy hormones are taking over all of his critical thinking, the act of crossdressing will typically lead to self-exploration, the rise of excitement in the private areas, and to the eventual act of masturbation. The release after masturbation is the reward for the risk taken. The act makes you feel good. It releases Dopamine in the brain that alters your mood to a better state. All seems to be right with the world! So why would you not want to do it again?

And again.

And again.

Now we come to the fork in the road. The lifetime crossdresser survived his childhood and escalated his crossdressing as a teenager. Whether dressing in solitude or with others (could be with other crossdressers or with a girlfriend), the crossdressing male finds himself in a brand new place.

I'm an adult! I have freedom! I can do what I want!

Maybe societal pressures shape the crossdresser enough to put away those frivolous and fancy thoughts in favor of a more traditional male role. Maybe crossdressing was truly just a phase of childish experimentation, or maybe those feminine feelings come back to lead to further development. If the crossdressing male decides to continue in his exploration, his may struggle with his gender identity and now, possibly, sexual identity.

Who am I?

Am I a man?

Or am I woman trapped in a man's body?

Gender dysphoria (or gender identity disorder) is a very real struggle. Men and women facing this battle feel strongly that they are not the gender of their biology. They can

experience anxiety, stress, and depression. There is confusion between the ties of their gender identity to their sexual orientation.

If you want to dress as a woman you must be attracted to men, right?

Who said that was the case? One of the biggest misconceptions for the nonfetish, non-transitioning crossdressers to dispel to their partners or family is that because they like to take on a female persona they must take on all the traits of the feminine, including the switch in their attraction to the opposite sex (from female to male). There is a definite and defined distinction between gender identity and sexual orientation. The two are mutually exclusive. The logic in your head would state, „IF women are attracted to men AND men like to dress as women THEREFORE men who like to dress as women must like men".

Try to keep those two concepts separate. Sure, some crossdressing men will pursue answers for both their gender identity and sexual orientation. And maybe they will realize that they are actually women trapped in a man's body. And maybe they will become transitioned women who prefer men, other women, or continue to be sexually fluid. The same could be said for the non-transitioning crossdressing man. They could be completely content with periodic feminine dressing but struggle with whether they are attracted to men, women or both.

I am so confused!

It is confusing. Adding to the mix is the fact that there is now a new term out there. Gender nonconforming (GNC) is a broader, more encompassing phrase that includes people with gender dysphoria. The term also describes individuals who are neither *only* male nor female. Think about that. A man or woman could have traits that are both masculine and feminine. So, remember that little girl you played with when you were just one of the kids in the neighborhood trying to get all the playtime in before the street lights came on? Remember that she loved to get as muddy as you and could climb trees way better than you? I think the label attached to her was that she was a tomboy. In practical terms, she would be considered gender nonconforming. Little girl tomboys are totally accepted in society. Feminine, prissy boys are not.

Is your child gender dysphoric?

- He consistently says that he is really a girl even though he is genetically a boy (or visa-versa).
- Strongly prefers friends of the opposite sex.
- Rejects the clothes, toys, and play of his assigned gender.
- Refuses to urinate in the way of his assigned gender.
- Says he wants to get rid of his genitals.
- Believes he will grow up into the opposite gender.
- Has extreme distress about his body changes during puberty.

I will come back to what happens to the lifetime crossdresser as an adult after this brief intermission from our sponsors about adult-onset crossdressing.

LATE BLOOMERS

You would think that a man would always have known that he wanted to dress as a woman.

How could those feelings have been suppressed or denied for an entire young life? Now, at age forty-two, my husband discovers that he likes femme clothes and makeup? WTF?

Men discovering their crossdressing urges as adults may have had those same feelings as children, but chose to ignore them. It may have been the result of a male dominated household was the reason for the suppression. Maybe there wasn't a feminine presence in the house to allow for borrowing clothes for experimentation. Perhaps there was little exposure to the crossdressing culture, even if the only example was Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie*. It's possible that they weren't aware anything was missing at all until an experience opened their eyes to the possibilities.

There are many triggers that could lead to your man deciding that wearing your bras and panties while you are at the grocery store is the right thing to do. I cannot promise that a seemingly innocent gender-bending Halloween couples costume concept will not evolve into something more frequent. But I know that a single instance of crossdressing may lead to nothing more than that one adventure, either.

If your partner discovers that crossdressing should be part of the understanding of who he is, it doesn't mean that he is, or always was, secretly homosexual. It doesn't mean this discovery will lead to plans of transitioning to womanhood or the dissolving of your relationship. But at the very least, it does mean that the dynamic of the relationship has shifted.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

Now the crossdresser is faced with the very real prospect of what comes next. Whether as a lifelong crossdresser or as a man who discovers feminine dressing as an adult, there are choices.

You can continue to live a partially fulfilled life where the two sides of the same mind never meet beyond the shadows of solitude and secrecy. You can wait to be discovered and suffer the consequences, hoping for the best while assuming the worst. Or you can share your burden with your partner, with the hopes that understanding, support and love will rule the day.

I am not advocating that you reveal yourself to your partner, dear crossdresser. That is a decision that must be weighed heavily by you. I do not know enough about you or your partner to begin to understand your situation and what has led you up to this moment of contemplation.

Remember Galileo?

He theorized that the world was not the center of the universe, but instead that it traveled around the sun. By speaking out his truth about cosmic mechanics, he was condemned and placed under a lifetime house arrest by the Roman Catholic Church. His words were heresy and he was admonished for them.

He knew the risks of letting his views come out. He faced those risks and lived out the rest of his life with those consequences. He lived with the truth, as he understood it.

I know I am over simplifying the processes and boiling down what the possible outcomes are. But sometimes placing a single KISS on the forehead of the issue – Keep It Simple, Silly – is the best course of action. And, maybe, my own story will help you and your partner find some enlightenment and hope.

At the end of the day, all we have is our hope, positivity, empathy, and the capacity for love. The rest are only things we have or want to have. And, sometimes, what we have now is far better than we realize.

We don't always get what we want, as Mick Jagger sang, but consider this... there are people out there who will never have what you have right now.

1.8. Truth And Consequences

Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.

~ William James

Men who are in earnest are not afraid of consequences.

~ Marcus Garvey

SELF-EXAMINATION

Socrates wrote, „The unexamined life is not worth living."

And his words should ring so very true too for all people, not just for crossdressers. We should always take a moment to reflect on who we are and where we are going on our life's journey. And we should not do it only once, but periodically. It is a truth that can be summed up by the following example.

I read J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* many years ago when I was a young man with the entire world in front of me. The novel's protagonist Holden Caulfield was considered a rock star of teenage rebellion. I rallied behind his cause, completely identifying with his teenage angst and his rage against the machine. I reread the novel much more recently, as many of us have done, and found Caulfield to be a whiney punk who needs to grow up and get a job! And did you know that there is a crossdresser in the book?

As we gain experiences in life, our opinions subtly change. We mature, for better or worse, becoming more positive or maybe more cynical. We get set in our ways... you can't teach an old dog new tricks, they say... and many other sayings about getting old that I can't remember. Heck, I'm still trying to figure out why I have a cup holder that slides out on my computer tower. Hmmmm.

IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE

Type in the following quote on Google, *There are no experts, only varying degrees of ignorance*, and you will find many who have used it to illustrate whatever point they were making. The same quote can apply to crossdressers and their partners.

It is a universal truth.

In fact, what is truth?

What follows are my truths as my little primitive brain understands them. Get ready for a bulleted list!

- Sylvester Stallone said, „You're the disease, and I'm the cure!" Ah, movie quotes. I love them! I don't believe there is a cure for crossdressing. Medical science will not be able to shock it out of us. The Church will not be able to dissuade us with threats of eternal damnation, a litany of prayers to a higher power, or an exorcism.
- I believe it is easier for someone to accept learning about a crossdresser when it doesn't affect him or her on a personal level. „Hey, my cousin is a crossdresser! It's cool.", is fine, but wait you are saying that about your boyfriend or husband. That tends

to be a different story. Then it becomes a 24/7 situation instead of an anecdotal one. Ironically, people are more apt to become champions or advocates for members of the transgender community when it does affect them on a personal level.

- People confuse the following terms: transgender versus transsexual versus transvestites. I know I confuse them. Yes, I consider crossdressers to be part of the transgender category as I take the term of transgender as „across gender". Crossdresser a synonym for a transvestite, but they do not necessarily fall into the transsexual category. It is important to research each term and how they are defined.
- The word transvestite carries with it a heavily weighted negative connotation. Stigma drips off of the word based on decades of misconceptions, misuse, misunderstanding, and taboo.

There are many other truths, which I hope I can bring to light throughout this book, dear reader. I can only urge you to read on.

While I personally identify as a crossdresser, I cannot advocate for all people who say that they are crossdressers.

Wait! What? Why are you writing this book, then?

Let me rephrase that for you. I know who I am, but I cannot know the history, desires, and experiences of anyone who is reading this book. Are you just a crossdresser (still hate the „just" part) or looking for more? Are you into the fetish of gender bending? Are you denying that there is a real woman screaming to emerge, whose voice will only be silenced by some measure of medical gender transitioning?

I am only here to help eliminate the misconceptions, taboos, and stigmas of what crossdressers are assumed to be. Ignorance is bliss, but that type of bliss has no place here.

A SECRET SHARED IS A SECRET HALVED

Or is it?

Walter Scott wrote, „Oh, what a wicked web we weave when first we practice to deceive." His words resound with the irony of how lies complicated life, even if the lie or omission was intended to make life easier for one or all parties involved. There are many components and layers of deceit to keeping or sharing a secret.

For crossdressers, the first component is the shame and heavy emotion of keeping the secret, of keeping that one thing hidden from those we love. Fear and experience are usually the major factors as to why we continue to hold the truth so close. But it is not just one lie, is it? The Big Lie is buttressed up by a series of interconnecting Little Lies, each compounding on top of the other. Each Little Lie is validated by the fact that it is necessary to keep the integrity of the Big Lie.

For the crossdresser, there are hidey-holes throughout the attic, car trunk, closet or garage with all of their femme stuff. There are clandestine meetings in bars, cars, hotels, and houses where the crossdresser feels safe to express their femininity – alone or with others. It is an existence worthy of Cold War spy games. The secret becomes all encompassing.

There could be a discovery that forces the secret out or a trauma that makes the secret too volatile to keep. Can those you love weather the impending storm of the truth? Can they rally behind your truth? I cannot answer that because every situation is so unique that to offer precise advice could have plenty of blowback for all involved.

WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

So now your partner knows, however the secret comes to light.

And by the goddesses, dear crossdressers, I hope your secret was revealed with humility, a bare soul, and a hope for understanding – with no defensiveness or the casting of blame to others beyond yourself. Don't be ashamed of who you are, but do take responsibility for keeping the secret.

You feel better, right?

Wow! Your secret is now revealed and that albatross is no longer around your neck. Where did that weight go? It didn't dissipate into thin air, I assure you. That weight lifted off you is now a crushing weight on your partner's shoulders. Are they strong enough to carry the burden?

That will all depend on the core strength of the individual. We aren't talking about Pilates here. Strength of mind, heart, character and spirit are critical to the success of any obstacle of this magnitude. You, dear crossdresser, have to help your partner carry the weight. Just because you dropped the weight of the secret on her, you are still fully responsible for picking it back up and off her frame. You must allow for your partner to build up her strength through your love and understanding, as well as her pursuit of knowledge and education (and her love for you).

Please realize that your partner is now forced to carry the weight of your secret... and has to lie about it to others. Your significant other may appear sullen and depressed, with no way to express the real reasons to friends and family who express concern about her new mood.

All partners should have the right to share the secret with someone outside the relationship. Their only course of dialogue cannot just be with the one who revealed the secret to them. There are already trust issues there, so any honest discussion may still be laced with the worry of falsehood.

I told Jen that she has every right to share my secret – now our secret – with anyone she deemed worthy. She didn't and doesn't need to get my approval to do so. I am comfortable and confident enough in my own skin to weather any questions or judgment from anyone outside of Jen and my relationship. In the end, defending me is not about defense, but about education. People will always judge crossdressers. It is human nature to make judgment on something that is foreign, misunderstood or different.

How do you have such confidence?

It's all an act, I assure you.

Kidding.

People don’t seem to realize that it takes strength of character to admit that we are different and unique from the social norm. It also take strength to share who we truly are with those we love, putting into jeopardy the lives we have created under what some may consider false pretenses. I may be an upper middle-class white male, but I am still in this strange ethereal minority. Once we accept ourselves fully, it becomes easier to emote that confidence to others. If you are positive and upbeat, that will shine through regardless of what you are wearing.

1.9. Savannah's Story

A man's face is his autobiography. A woman's face is her work of fiction.

~ Oscar Wilde

I'm writing an unauthorized autobiography.

~ Steven Wright

ONCE UPON A TIME

It seems most appropriate to write about my life as if it were a fairy tale. I mean there is a beautiful (ahem) princess trapped in a castle that, even if she is rescued or escapes, faces the wrath of most of the villagers and royalty of the kingdom. Are there dragons? Only if you count *drag-ons*! Is there a knight in shining armor? In fact, there are several who rescued Savannah from the evils that men (and women) do. It is a tale that spans the ages and across hundreds of miles. Riveting adventures from childhood to adulthood, filled with self-discovery and enlightenment.

Oh, enough!

Maybe I should have the Star Wars *Long, long ago, in a galaxy far away...* scroll to give you all the backstory? Nah. That wouldn't cover what I feel I need to tell, either. My story will basically be a series of vignettes, hopefully illustrating my journey to date and my hopes for the future.

„I was born a poor black child. I remember the days, sittin' on the porch with my family..." Wait. That was Steve Martin's Navin R. Johnson character from the 1979 movie, *The Jerk.*

HERE GOES EVERYTHING

Anyway, my childhood upbringing was nothing special or extraordinary, except to say that it was extraordinary in its ordinariness. I was born in 1971 in Detroit, Michigan to blue-collar lower middle class parents, with a sister two years older, and eventually a little brother born four years after me. Yes, I was the middle child – the forgotten child – who typically disappears from the family dynamic.

I was quiet, introverted, and sometimes shy. I ran, played, and enjoyed suburban life with the other kids on the close-knit dead end block. Back then, we were able to play out in the streets or in the neighbors' yards from sun up to sundown during the summer, with only the fear that you better be home when the street lights came on or when a parent called out your name for dinner from the side screen door.

I never imagined that my life was anything outside the normal. What would I know? I was just a little kid. Except there came that one fateful day where my curiosity about those clothes I saw my mother fold and put away got the better of me. I don't rightly recall the exact age or date but I would put the first quest at roughly age five. Why did her white bras fascinate me? Was it the shimmer of the material or the hints of lace? To this day, I cannot recall why I originally wanted to touch her clothing or wanted to try them on. I don't know why I wanted

to wad up face towels or socks to fill out the cups so that the shape was more like my mom. I continued to sneak a peek at my mom's clothes as often as it was safe to do so. It just felt right.

What did not feel right was the fact that I knew I was being bad. Not because of the act of dressing in my mom's bra and girdle, and sometimes those black patent two inch heels that I never saw her wear, but because I knew I was trespassing into other people's belongings.

Don't touch your sister's toys. Don't go into our room.

I understood the concept of privacy and personal space. My dad had (and still has) several rifles that he stored under his bed and in his closet. I really had no interest in handling the weapons. There is an inherent draw to the power of a gun for a young boy but I had enough fear and respect for them to know to leave them alone.

Interestingly enough, while I knew it was wrong to sneak into my parents' room – and eventually, my sister's room – to find feminine clothing to try on, I never felt that the act of dressing was wrong. It seemed natural. But I inherently knew that I was doing something that my parents wouldn't appreciate if they found out. Between the two, I think I was more worried about the consequence of the trespassing than getting caught crossdressing.

GROWING PAINS

This process went on for several years, from pre-adolescence through my teenage years. And, as I wrote earlier, the teenage years brought with them teenage hormones and a progression from secret dressing for a sense of comfort to secret dressing that was more for visual fantasy and self-exploration. I loved to see myself in the mirror and wonder what it would feel like to be a girl. What did they feel?

You know the old saying?

If I had boobs, I would be playing with them all day long!

And that is aptly put to explain how it felt. I wished I had breasts that would fill out the bra I was wearing. *Why?* Because stuffing the bra with socks or face towels seemed like a cheat. And it didn't do anything to get me closer to understanding my feminine side. Sure, I vaguely saw something in the mirror that was somewhat feminine (if I squinted long enough) but there was a divide that I knew in my heart I would never be able to realize.

Sears Roebuck used to have a powerhouse direct mail catalog where you could buy almost anything – from clothing and tools to pre-fabricated houses! I used to look at the pictures of the women in their bras, panties, and slips with the hopes that I could look like that one day. What I realize now is that I have a huge appreciation of the female form. It is a perfection I strive for in my feminine presentation when crossdressing.

In my early teenaged years, trying lipstick was as far into the application of makeup as I would venture. If I stared only at my lips, I could ignore the rest of my obviously masculine face. It served to make the process a little bit more complete when used in addition to whatever clothing I tried on. The teenage years brought with it my sister's pantyhose, bathing suits and leotards. That was also when I seriously started reading comics.

And who were my favorite characters? I liked Batman, Superman and the Flash, but I loved Wonder Woman and the Black Canary. And, yes, I tried to use my sister's pantyhose and black bathing suit to recreate Black Canary's look, sans boots, choker, and bolero jacket or blond hair. I knew that I could never be successful in trying to replicate Wonder Woman's look (I feel that way even now!), especially after Lynda Carter epitomized the character in such grand and visual fashion. So, even before its time as something mainstream to do, I had unknowingly had my first attempt at cosplay.

Nothing more notable occurred during those years before high school. Well, that's not necessarily true. There were two instances where I was almost caught in the act. One of the times I was caught trying to put a bikini bottom back into my sister's drawer. I realized my mom was in her bedroom seconds before I went into my sister's room with the bikini. I stuffed the bathing suit bottoms into my sock drawer but not before my mom came in and demanded to know what I was doing. I showed her the bikini bottoms and explained it away as a prank I was playing on my sister.

Did she believe you?

I thought she did. Her reaction to seeing me with my sister's bikini bottoms was the comment, „Do you want people to think you're gay?". Of course, my mom was the same one who accused me of smoking after finding damp sawdust in my winter jacket pocket (I worked with my dad on a side job). At any rate, I redoubled my efforts to keep my activities hidden.

In high school, I did have a few girlfriends. I believe it was my senior year that I started becoming sexually active. I was lucky enough to have a girlfriend that I had been able to share about my want to wear women's clothing and underwear, and was lucky enough that she was open to encounters where one, or both of us in turn, wore lingerie. It was a turning point for my feelings of acceptance and confidence.

GETTING AN EDUCATION

The positive feelings did not last long. High school turned into college, with fulltime jobs, school projects and a change in girlfriends. The university was a commuting college so I continued to live at home, missing out on any alone time I could have had to discover more about myself. The one girlfriend that ended up being my wife (sorry, spoiler alert!) was not receptive to the idea of my wanting to dress. Therefore, my growth into understanding my authentic self was replaced with the responsibilities of my studies at school and trying to provide for my new family. With all that being said, the feeling of wanting to dress never went away.

I was able to secure a few concessions from my wife such as periodically wearing a teddy to bed and a single romantic interlude where she agreed to let me dress. It ended up being awkward and unfulfilling. I had high expectations as to how the experience would play out and I assumed that my wife's agreement was wholehearted. My want was too much and her want was too little.

Therefore, the experience fizzled and my confidence for the growth of my identity was stunted. With a reminder that my wife was not supportive of my alter identity, I began to feel that I was abnormal and wrong to feel the way I did.

Well, more life changes occurred. In the early 1990s, my wife and I began a photography and graphic design business. We succeeded in the Detroit Tri-County area for a time, but the economy – and our inexperience in marketing our business and our then-novice talent – forced us to look elsewhere for employment. The opportunities that presented themselves ended up being in a different state of the union altogether!

In 1995 we moved to the Big Apple, sharing a studio apartment in Manhattan's Upper East Side for a year with my wife's brother, his girlfriend and their baby. You guessed it... not too many opportunities to dress.

We worked 9 to 5. We enjoyed the company of our family. We took advantage of the sights and sounds of the city. After a year, my wife and I had saved enough to get our own apartment in the same area. The hopes of returning to a life where I had opportunities to dress again were close at hand.

Had I been unhappy during those previous months? It's hard to recall but I remember that I did periodically think about dressing. But I knew that opportunities would be scarce so I had braced for that reality. I worked hard and focused on what I could do.

With the move to our own apartment, the hopes of dressing *en femme* were realized. I bought new underwear and started to dress on a daily basis under my male clothes. I finally felt more complete again, after the twelve-month drought.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGED

Another milestone started with an unexpected conversation on a Thanksgiving family holiday road trip between Michigan and New York. My wife told me about how she and a female co-worker had been discussing their thoughts of experimentation with lesbianism.

That was shocking enough. My wife had been previously hurt by a high school boyfriend who had discovered his true sexual orientation during their relationship, and had told me several stories of being grossed out by women hitting on her.

I continued to listen. I really didn't have a choice since I was driving at the time and there weren't too many rest stops to pull into for the duration of the conversation. She continued by saying that she would allow me to freely crossdress if I agreed to allow her to pursue this experiment with her co-worker.

What a deal!

I am not saying that I was onboard with the idea of my wife going outside of our marriage. But I understood enough about my struggles with my gender identity to realize that her request included her own need for self-discovery. Plus, she had dangled a reward for my consent and I was happy to be given permission to openly pursue crossdressing past the break point I had found myself at.

The upside was that the girl that my wife became involved with also took an interest in my feminine development. She helped to pick out club wear for me. She gave me a couple

pointers for comportment and how to move when dancing. Another co-worker of my wife's, an openly lesbian woman, also came to the apartment to give me my first full makeover. She and her girlfriend became instrumental in helping me be comfortable in a full feminine guise. While my wife was otherwise engaged with her new girlfriend, I had the support of these other women (my first den mothers) to support me as we went out to nightclubs in Queens and Manhattan.

It was a heady time in my life as Savannah. I was in full feminine makeup. I was out in public. I had the support of others. I was accepted and allowed to flourish. My den mothers were fearless and their confidence bled off onto me. I felt like I belonged, even though it was under the veil of the clubbing nightlife and with friends who were also not the mainstream with their own sexuality.

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Speaking of sexuality...

During Savannah's roaring 1990s, several things occurred. I accepted who I was, I struggled with my sexual identity, and, last but not least, I discovered my name.

This was the first time I accepted that I indeed fell under the label and umbrella of the LGBTQ community as a transvestite. Back in those days, the term of crossdresser had not yet replaced the more clinical moniker. I spoke the words out loud to one of my co-workers. I was proud of who I was becoming and wanted to shout it out in proclamation to whoever I could. Yeah, I was still pretty dumb. But I was lucky enough to tell only those people that were supportive and open-minded. I also wanted to tell some of my family.

I sent a letter to my sister with a photo of me dressed as Savannah with a note to call me. Back in those days, the Internet was still a baby and I resorted to the old school snail mail method of paper, pen and film to come out to my sibling. Although she didn't understand what it all meant to be me, she and her husband were both very supportive and loving to me. I thanked them for that act of kindness. I still have their wonderful typewritten responses in a four-page letter back to me.

As a transvestite, I assumed that I must also be gay. I struggled with the fact that while I loved to be with women I thought that as a feminine dresser I was supposed to be attracted to men. Yes, I fell into the same traps of misconception as everyone else. My wife, her co-workers, and I went to a bar and restaurant called Lucky Cheng's where the staff and entertainers were all drag queens and transvestites. They were gorgeous. I found them attractive. So, again, the idea was reinforced that I must be gay (because I knew they were men underneath it all). But I wasn't attracted to any man presenting as a man.

Therefore, another discovery was made. It was okay to be attracted to a man dressed as a woman. *Why?* Because those crossdressing men represented what I still find so attractive about women. These performers had perfected the art form of feminization in their presentation, their mannerisms, speech, and all the rest. I was envious at that time because I was still a novice in my own craft. I adore femininity and the inherent power that it holds. Men

hold no attraction or interest for me. It is the underlying feminine current that women possess, both in presentation and personality that holds the appeal for me.

And as a grand finale, I discovered my name. Like the genesis of any good stripper or drag name, you usually use the formula of your first pet's name plus the street you grew up on. Well, I surely wasn't going to answer to the name Shaggy.

And don't call me Shirley.

I wanted something exotic, but accessible. I wanted a name that didn't sound like a stripper moniker or used an „I" in place of a „y". And I didn't want a name that made me sound like a spinster. I didn't have any ideas. My den mothers and my wife's girlfriend threw out names but none sounded right. Then, the name came to me out of the southern blue.

Savannah was now my name, and it represented my identity as a woman. It completed me as a person, even if I still had years to go to perfect my presentation and confidence.

TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGING

I had discovered much about myself. I had accepted and declared in a loud voice my label of transvestite. I had given myself a feminine name. I better understood my position in life, grasping my basic gender identity and reaffirming my sexual identity.

My wife came to her own revelations that she was, indeed, a lesbian. I was shocked! I was happy for her discovery, but I knew that I couldn't exist in a loveless marriage. It would be a sham. I didn't want only the guise of intimacy, but the real thing. I felt I deserved that. And I felt that it would break my heart if I continued in the relationship with the assumption that I would see her with other partners. So we divorced.

That decision was not the price to be paid. That action was for the best for both of us. We could both move on with our own pursuits of happiness. I moved to Queens, New York, to be closer to my job and to cut the cost of rent. I became involved with another woman, hopeful that her knowledge of my feminine self would allow the creation of a more balanced relationship.

And it was good. She was fine with my dressing. She went out to the same clubs I was familiar with and we enjoyed each other's company. All seemed to be becoming more normal and accepted.

At that time, another of my female co-workers told me she had a boyfriend who dressed. We made a plan to go to a club on Steinway Street in Astoria. I knew what drag queens were and some of the other fetish factions that exists, but my co-worker's boyfriend was a crossdressing type that I had not encountered before.

When they came over to our apartment I met them in the lobby, fully dressed. The woman looked ready for the club but the boyfriend was still in boy mode. We went upstairs. He did change into a LBD (little black dress), hose, and heels... and that was it.

I was confused.

No makeup, no jewelry, no wig.

I tried to wrap my brain around it anyway. If that was his preference, who was I to say it was wrong? Heck, I was dressed in my own LBD and fully decked out *en femme*. Who was I to judge?

We clubbed for a bit and had a good time. Then the boyfriend did something else that confused me. After a couple hours, he went to the bathroom and returned with his boy clothes on. Why would he go through the effort to dress and shed out of it after a couple of hours? It was a wig scratcher, for sure. The thought has stuck with me, even if I didn't understand what it meant.

On another topic of discovery, I now realize that my girlfriend may have been worldlier and more in tune then I was. There had been an evening where I had been particularly stressed at work that day. She told me that maybe dressing would make me feel better. She was right. The feel of the material through my fingers and the way the clothing caressed my body did make me calmer and more relaxed. It did take some time for the stress to bleed off after dressing, but spending the evening dressed did allow me to focus on something other than work.

So, all was right with the world. My girlfriend was supportive. I was discovering my balance between my male and female personas, and my confidence as Savannah.

But life has a way of changing without you wanting it to.

BACK DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

The relationship did not work out.

Not because of my two halves, but because of hers.

What the heck are you talking about? I thought she was a real woman?

I assure you she was (and still is) a real woman, folks. In our case, I now more fully grasp that she was struggling with her own identity. Not a crisis of gender identity, but one of racial identity. Her mother was Irish and her father was African American. Her Irish grandparents, due to a breakdown of her nuclear family dynamic, raised her. She didn't feel accepted by either race. I was still too immature and focused on my own development to understand fully what she was dealing with. And I was still too fresh off my divorce to want to be involved in such heady dilemmas.

So we both moved on.

Such is the way of love and relationships... and life.

And, hopefully, each experience impacts us enough to allow us to see the world in a different way.

Because I spent so much time at the office, I began to date another co-worker. She had what I needed. She was smart, focused, strong, and free of drama. As with my previous girlfriend, I made sure she was aware of Savannah. I sat down with her after work one day and showed her a photo of me as her. I wanted all the cards on the table. If she was not ready for the idea of being with a crossdresser, I would rather have loved and lost early versus later.

I was pleasantly surprised that she was okay with it. She was definitely a graduate of the old school, but being raised in NYC allowed for her to have more exposure to the concept of

crossdressing. We eventually moved in together and the relationship flourished – as they typically do in the dreaded *honeymoon phase*. Why is it a phase, why can't it be for always? Anyway, I digress. I showed her all of my clothes and shoes. She even tried on several of my dresses. It was a novelty for her. It was something new and interesting.

But she and Savannah did not go out to the dance clubs, or even to dinner. That wasn't her scene. I understood that. She was a little bit older and past all that adolescent partying. She had raised two kids by herself – working fulltime – after her own divorce. I was attracted to her no-nonsense attitude.

We were together for fifteen years so I will not bore you with the minutia of each and every year. Over the years we saved up enough to buy a house, marriage was proposed (although we never married), we had several dogs running around the house, worked together in the same office, took in her daughter's family for a time, and lived life.

During those years, after the novelty of my crossdressing seemed to wear off I started to feel that she was becoming more disapproving of my female side. I only dressed at home on occasion. Each time I did dress up (no makeup, no wig), her reactions evolved from a sideways glance and disinterest to an eventual eye roll.

To let you in on a little secret, I am a very sensitive individual. I take things personally. I am fairly empathic and can feel how you feel. Where my empathy has a chink in its armor is when it misreads the reasons behind those reactions. I am a bit more enlightened now, but in those days it was a continuing reminder that I had lost the support I had once enjoyed.

THE GREAT PUMPKIN

One glaring example I recall of her disapproval occurred one weekend during Halloween.

Yep, Halloween.

We shared a co-op in a community in Northern New Jersey. The property had a lake, a couple of pools, and a community center. There was an event on the calendar for a costume party. We had been together for seven years at that point, if memory serves.

I was excited to dress as a China girl, buying the dress, the sandals, and the straight jet-black wig with bangs. Although she was aware that I had made this plan, she became more and more distant about it. I tried to ignore her bad vibes and enjoy preparing for the evening. When I was ready to leave for the other side of the lake, she told me she didn't want to show up with me to the party.

I was devastated.

I was close to just taking everything off and forgetting the whole event, but decided to soldier on without her support. I went to the party a little bit early (because I am a stickler for promptness, plus wanted to get away from the bad energy at home) and waited for my friends to arrive. I helped one of them out of her car (because she had a cane and leg cast) and was delighted that she didn't recognize me. I was also delighted that, when she did realize it was me under the wig, she was totally cool with it.

The other women seemed to enjoy my costume, as well. Maybe because they thought it was brave that a man would attempt the costume and show a feminine side (because their

husbands wouldn't dare to try it). Maybe they thought I looked convincing. Maybe it was because they liked me as a person, in general.

The men were a different story.

Their reactions fell into three camps. The first would be the typical good-natured masculine razing after seeing another man in drag. They played it off as parody and didn't act any different around me beyond the teasing. The second reaction was something more of avoidance. They were unsure how to take me, whether due to a homophobic issue or a subconscious vague attraction or appreciation they couldn't rationalize. They would wander away if I added myself to their group, even if their friends and spouses were having a good time chatting. And then there was the reaction that drinking men don't like to remember the next day. There was one man, in particular, who throughout the night would put his arm around me or pat me on my ass. He would lean in close, invading my personal space, and tell me a slurred and unintelligible secret truth or desire. The more drinks he consumed, the more pretty he promised I was.

The night was a bag of mixed reactions, from total acceptance to disdain to desire. I was amazed by the appreciation, saddened by the social awkwardness, and tickled by that one man's beer-goggled flirting.

What happened to your girlfriend? Did she show up?

Yes. About an hour into the full swing of music and dancing and socializing, she did arrive. I was happy she had made it (because I was worried about her). But she didn't want to really be near me or act as my girlfriend around me. What I know now, that I had ignored then, was the following; that she was struggling with being with me as a couple in public, and that she was worried *for* me because she didn't want people to start whispering about the type of person I was.

We didn't really talk about it afterward.

We should have talked about it.

There was no synergy between us as it came to understanding Savannah in our relationship. And that was the first of many situations where her reaction to me continued to weigh on my mind. If she was unable to accept me, then I was likely more a freak than I realized. How could I be confident and feel acceptance if the one person I assumed loved me the most was unable to see past the taboo and fetish that she believed my crossdressing represented?

FROM MIND CLOSET TO COAT CLOSET

As few as six years ago (as of this original publication), I realized that I needed something more for Savannah. The chain keeping her immobile and miserable in the closet at home was becoming unbearable. A vague form of despair was eroding my normally upbeat and positive nature. Maybe my positivity and my hope for humanity were the only things that allowed me to continue for as long as I had.

I was afraid of who I was. Savannah was something to be ashamed of. My partner had rejected me so why should I continue to believe that I was a normal person? But then I found

a measure of courage to make an appointment with a woman named Karen on Long Island at a business named Femme Fever, (my girlfriend and I were living on the island at this point) who gave me my first professional makeover.

Karen's business had a closet full of clothes and a cabinet with a variety of wigs and heels. I had brought some of my things, as well, and spent a few hours with someone who understood me and catered to me. She whipped up different looks and I explored my femininity through photography. Although I still only saw my male form in most of the photos, there were a few where the captured smile showed a comfort with my feminine side. It was a moment of bliss and rediscovery of Savannah.

For those couple hours I felt complete.

Then I returned to reality.

But my new reality wasn't the same as it was. At home, I was still in the closet and contemplating full dressing in secret, but now something had brightened within me.

I was still afraid to discuss my desires to crossdress with my girlfriend so it wasn't until a year later – when my girlfriend went out of town to visit her sister – that I returned to Karen for another makeover. More acceptance and confidence bloomed in my mind. I stopped making excuses for myself. I faced the fear of my girlfriend's disapproval and told her that I wanted to go to one of Karen's discussion groups.

I wasn't adept with my own makeup so I made the appointment with Karen to do it for me before the discussion group. I was nervous as Savannah, but interacted with the other crossdressers that were in attendance. We sat on couches and chairs in Karen's den and each of us took a turn telling our story, as we understood it. We got to hear other stories, finding out that pieces of their tales made sense to us and proved that we were not alone in the universe. I realized that I no longer suffered from terminal uniqueness.

Open 24 Hours

I became friends with several of the crossdressers in the group over the following sessions. After I became comfortable with applying my own makeup, I would get dressed at home before driving to the discussion group, but was still rushing to get there in time.

One time I forgot to get money to pay for the session. A couple of the other gurls offered to pay my way. I was very appreciative, but made it a point that I would need to go to 7-Eleven to get money to repay them. It became a running joke throughout the evening that I would soon have to face the harsh white fluorescent bars of the mini-mart.

And it happened. Two of the crossdressing girls, Victoria and Marisol, drove in a convoy with me to find a 7-Eleven close to a bar we were hoping to go to after our group session. The bar had closed down indefinitely, but the 7-Eleven had not. Victoria and I ventured from our cars to the front door. An older woman held the door for us. I told her a hushed ‚thank you'. Victoria got something to drink and I withdrew $40 from the ATM. The cashiers looked at Victoria (she was wearing a plaid skirt and thigh high boots), smiling and telling us to come again.

We made our way back to the parking lot where I could repay Marisol. It was then that I realized all the fears I had let pile up over the past few years had been unrealized and

unrealistic. Angry mobs didn't materialize with pitchforks and torches. I wasn't pointed out as a freak or an undesirable. I was just another person living in the world.

From that moment on I never looked back at the fear of being Savannah. My friends and I would go out to the bars, dance clubs, and out to dinners. We enjoyed the dancing and sisterhood, choosing to spend our time chatting and basking in the knowledge that we were entitled to be the people we needed to be.

Needless to say, my relationship with my girlfriend did not work out. Some of it stemmed from my revelations concerning Savannah and what I needed out of life and from my partner. Some of it was due to a new family dynamic that I couldn't deal with. Some was just the decay of the relationship that seemed too broken to be fixed to a point of contentment.

I had much to do with why the relationship ended. I played a big part assuming things and not communicating my needs and expectations. And I wasn't ready for the commitments that she had made on behalf of others in her life that she loved unconditionally. We continued to work together in the same office, finally able to return to a point in our relationship where there was no animosity of the past, both looking forward to our individual futures.

1.10. Our Story – Savannah & Jen

Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies.

~ Aristotle

The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt within the heart.

~ Helen Keller

Fairy Tales

And they lived happily ever after.

Those are the words that all little girls want to hear at the end of the fairy tales read to them at bedtime. But in life, all people – men and women – want their own *happily ever after*. Whether for their personal lives, their careers, their families, or enlightenment of self – or a combination of some or all of the above – each of us wants to live a life filled with meaning and purpose.

For me, I yearn for a life where my male and female sides have a balance, where each is accepted and loved equally by my partner. For some crossdressing men, this ideal may be considered so unattainable that it is akin to being on the same level as locating the mythical Holy Grail.

NOT JUST A COSTUME

And this is where *my story* becomes our story. After the split with my girlfriend from the previous chapter, I became involved (you guessed it) with another coworker. Hey, I can't help it if that is where I spend most of my time! And she loves AMC's The Walking Dead, so bonus points there. I had met Jen when she was hired but really didn't speak much with her during her first year. Then we started talking about TWD and argued over the merits of Rick Grimes, the main character. Flash-forward to us spending time together after her attendance at an event I was part of and we come to the point where we both realized that our relationship was reaching that next level of intimacy.

Continuing with the same formula that I employed with all of my girlfriends throughout my adult life, I felt it was important to reveal my authentic self to her. I showed her a picture from my smart phone (yes, I had graduated into the digital age when showing photos of Savannah). Jen had seen me dressed in my superhero cosplay costumes at the office Halloween parties. She said, „So? I've seen your Halloween costumes before." I had to explain that it wasn't just a costume and that dressing as a woman was part of who I was.

It was a sobering moment and a shocking revelation to Jen. How should she respond to being told that crossdressing was part of the everyday life of the man she was interested in? What were the basis questions to ask me?

- How long have you been doing it?
- So does that mean you like men?
- Do you go out in public?

- How often do you dress?
- Do you want to be a woman?

All were valid questions to have asked, especially from a novice with limited understanding and experience with our kind. Instead, I relayed to her a shortform of my story, preempting her questions by answering them before she could think to ask them. I have included an essay in the next chapter written by Jen that tells of that evening from her perspective. It's worth the read.

Jen and I parted ways for the evening, having dropped this shocking news on her prior to having to leave for a previous commitment. But I quickly didn't feel right about my decision to leave. She was now in a fragile state and, in my absence, turned to her best friend. Coincidentally, her best friend had herself been involved with a crossdressing man. You would think that a friend who was in a relationship with a crossdressing man would have all sorts of insight.

She had insight, all right.

Jen's friend, Patty, had been involved in a very intense on/off relationship with a fetish dresser. According to her, the sex was focused on his dressing in fishnets and garters (and more). She struggled with her feelings about the intensity of the relationship and her obsessive emotions over it. Jen and Patty revealed what they knew and Patty warned her to dump me outright.

After my shortened evening out, I asked Jen if I could come back to her apartment. She relented and we found ourselves sitting on her living room couch. The space was filled with a mix of awkward silences and stilted questions from Jen that I answered as honestly as I could.

The experience was overwhelming for Jen – and for me. I faced almost assured rejection of a woman I had come to care about. All because of whom I was. And Jen faced the prospect that if she pursued the relationship she would be involved with a man who was not completely a man.

Two reasons stayed the date of my execution. The first was that she felt a strong attraction and connection to me (my male side). It was the reason that we were on the precipice of a relationship to begin with. The second reason, in her post-divorce, she realized that she wanted to try this relationship because she felt I could be *The One*.

What about the crossdressing bombshell?

Well, thank you for the compliment... wait... you meant the news I dropped on her lap? Sorry.

Jen admits that she compartmentalized her reservations about my feminine side because of the overwhelming notion that she could have possibly discovered her soulmate in me. With a bit of new relationship jitters, the undiscovered country of what a crossdressing partner would mean to her, and the promise that we could continue to be friends if all else failed, Jen ventured into the unknown with me.

Lift Up Your Hearts

That solitary adventure led to another interlude, then a third. We were left wondering how we got to this point where Jen found herself in a relationship with a man she now loved (and I adore her more... although she would say she loves me more!) with this pink elephant smack dab in the middle of her living room and taking up her closet space.

She had begun the process of processing.

How does one live with a crossdresser?

What is to be expected?

Her only practical knowledge had come from a woman who had begged her to never see me again. In fact, Patty quickly ended their friendship as a consequence of Jen not heeding her advice. Jen tried to broach the subject of their struggling relationship (and about me) but was rebuffed each time a chance to discuss it was presented. Patty felt that, like her lover, I was a pervert only interested in kinky sex and wearing lingerie to get off. Hey, I enjoy my sensuality and sexuality as much as the next crossdresser – maybe more so – but that doesn't mean I'm a pervert!

But the true tipping point between the three of us came on a fateful day during a Sunday morning service at the church the three of us attended. Yes, I believe in God. I strive to be a good person, to do good work and to care for my fellow human. Jen and I both enjoyed many of the pastor's sermons, the fellowship, and the spirit that buzzed through us during the act of singing. Before the sermon began, the congregation was asked to stand and shake hands with those around them. As would be the case that day, Patty and her young teenage daughter were seated directly behind us.

I shook the hand of Patty's daughter. You could see in Patty's face the disgust and repulsion she felt toward me. There was a sense of profound disapproval. It was as if she expected that I was going to kidnap her daughter with the intent of molesting her. Patty truly felt that I was a perverted individual, maybe as bad as a pedophile.

It was a polarizing moment.

I understand who I am. At most times, I am in balance with my two sides. Patty, who only knew me through short greetings and by my label as a crossdresser, felt validated to lump me in as just one of thousands of kinky, sexually deviant men who got off on dressing en femme. I was just a statistic based on Patty's one personal experience.

I truly understand that assessing our personal experiences is one of the tools we use to perceive the world around us. If you touch a hot pan on a stovetop, you are less apt to make the same mistake again. You become more cautious. Unfortunately, her experience was just one sliver in the spectrum of what crossdressing means for men (as you have seen in our earlier chapters). But the damage had been done, right under God's nose in his own house.

I was hurt.

Jen was hurt and hurt for me. Patty had slandered the man she loved. After the shock of the actual event wore off, I felt pity for Patty. Her blindered understanding about the motivations of crossdressing men will forever keep her from an enlightened life.

For Your Consideration ~

Are all redheads of the same temperament? Do alcoholics have the same story or genetics or trauma that led them to drink? It's easy to dismiss all crossdressers as being the same, but that is a limited worldview on the topic.

Understanding a crossdresser begins with an education, not only from the crossdresser's mouth but also from as much relevant reading material and research as is available. Confiding in family, friends or a therapist to talk through their feelings about our crossdressing is understandable and should be fully supported.

RE-EDUCATION

Jen had asked me questions about my wants, likes, and origins. But at the onset, I advised her to do some reading. The most notable books I was aware of at the time were *My Husband Betty* by Helen Boyd and *My Husband Wears My Clothes* by Peggy J. Rudd. Jen, through her own research, found a short e-book entitled *An Addicted Crossdresser* and a longer effort in *Head Over Heels*. After each reading, Jen was able to ask me more intelligent questions. But knowledge, like many things, comes with a price. Jen's reading replaced her fears based on ignorance with fears based on education. Ugh! Now, because of her reading, I had to start answering questions about transitioning to womanhood. When I told her I was happy being a part-time female, our conversation went something along these lines:

„In the book, many men wanted to transition," Jen said. „They said they were happy to just crossdress, then decided a few years later to be women! "

„I'm happy being who I am," I replied.

„That's what the men in the book said, too," she stated.

"But I like my parts the way they are," I insisted.

While Jen was discovering more about the crossdressing and transgender communities, some of her reading steered her toward several crossdressing men who ultimately made the realization that they needed to take that final step in the journey toward their female gender identity. It is difficult to argue that I am happy as a man who only wants to dress as a woman once a week when my response to the question has already been chronicled in print by a transitioned male-to-female (MtF) woman.

It's true; I had questioned my gender identity throughout the years. I still fantasize about waking up one day and looking in the bathroom mirror to see a beautiful buxom curvy woman staring back at me. But that same fantasy allows me the ability to morph back into my male biology anytime I chose.

I want it to be easy.

I am totally lazy.

That's a fact I am okay with sharing.

The fantasies are about being able to present as a female without all the crossdressing trappings of body shapers, breast forms, hip pads and shaving. All that preparation is sometimes exhausting. There are times where the thought of transforming into Savannah

after ten hours of work is daunting and off-putting. The sixty to ninety minutes it takes me to transform can be therapeutic or it can be drudgery.

So Jen continued to read and ask me questions that I answered to the best to my ability. But fears are sometimes irrational and all consuming. Before we lived together (another spoiler!), I was excited to show her all of Savannah's stuff. Jen came over to my apartment and I started parading out all my dresses, heels, and my wigs on their individual wig stands. Her face went waxen and slack, her eyes went wide.

Jen was overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of the display. She hadn't realized that I had more women's stuff than men's stuff. She felt I must want to be a woman more often than a man because of the amount of female gear I had.

My excitement was quickly replaced with a feeling of rejection. I took her shock at the amount of clothing in my closet as not accepting the feminine part of me.

For Jen it was too much, too quickly.

I could see on her face that she was uncomfortable and I stopped showing her my things. We talked about how she was feeling. She shared her emotions and I was forced to look at myself in plainer terms. I had to realize that this was all new to her. Jen had to tell me several times that ,... you have had a lifetime to understand who you are, while I'm still trying to figure this out. You are expecting me to process all this in days'.

It continues to be difficult for me to accept that even if someone loves me unconditionally as a man, there can still be conditions in the fine print when it comes to finding out your man also wants to present as a woman.

THE UNVEILING

Soon thereafter we made plans for her to see me as Savannah in the flesh. For the first time in my life, I had a woman that wanted to see the transformation from start to finish. She didn't want a repeat of the closet reveal. She didn't want to be overwhelmed or shocked into submission by my sudden change into femininity. So she looked on as a spectacular to my ritual of becoming female. From putting on all of my undergarments and padding, to watching me apply my foundation and makeup, to helping me zip up my dress, to the final reveal with my favorite red-haired wig, Jen was there for it all.

Like her, I am also not a fan of being dressed *en femme* halfway. I wear women's underwear every day, but to wear more without trying to present as feminine is always a little awkward for me. I look odd in the mirror. It must also look strange to Jen.

At that point, it just looks like I am a man in a dress.

And I don't want to look like a man in a dress.

I want to be passable. I want to blend in. I want people on the street to completely ignore me because they don't have a reason to give me a second glance. Or if they do give me a second glance, it's because they are trying really hard to figure out if I am a woman or a man. Passibility (for me, anyway) is an important part of the process. It may seem shallow, but I see it as perfecting my craft.

Jen, at this point, had seen my femme closet and now had witnessed first hand a full-fledged transformation into Savannah.

And you know what?

She wasn't scared away.

We talked as long as we could on the subject that night in my bedroom (without it becoming too much to process again). She didn't think I was a weirdo (well, maybe she did a little), letting me know that she didn't recognize me and complimenting me that I looked pretty.

What else could a crossdresser want to hear from their partner? Jen had embraced the notion that I could be a serious crossdresser and not be an embarrassment. She saw Savannah, even if she couldn't find the male me under the makeup and hair. My dressing for Jen for the first time was a rousing success – for both of us.

At this point, Savannah was not going out very often with her gurlfriends. In fact, I did not go out at all in those first few months, either alone or with Jen. But the end of the year was looming and one of my major favorite events was on the horizon.

COSTUMES AND THE COMIC CON

I am a huge comic book, sci-fi and zombie nerd. I'm proud to admit it. And the eastern seaboard Mecca for nerds, like me, is the New York Comic Con in Manhattan every October. Jen was excited to be a part of the experience (and was interested in cosplay). I would be able to show Jen the ropes of going to the annual New York Comic Con and involve her with another passion that was close to my heart. We spent several weeks finding an extra ticket and assembling our costumes. And then the big weekend arrived.

The comic book convention, like crossdressing, covers many more genres than just comic books. It is a sensory overload of comics, pop culture, movies and television, manga, sci-fi, and cosplay! Jen kept pace throughout the event schedule over the first three days like a champ. Early Sunday morning – our cosplay day – we dressed, primped and turned into our superhero alter egos and set off for the Long Island Railroad to make our way into the city.

Jen was very nervous. She was nervous for going out in public in New York City dressed as a slinky superheroine in a skin-tight black bodysuit and shockingly white long wig. She was also nervous for me. She worried about what people would say about me, who I was dressed as, and how they would pass judgment on me. Once we arrived at the venue and started to see so many other people in costumes of all types, she relaxed and came to the realization that we were just another of hundreds of costumers in attendance.

We blended in.

People stopped us with the hopes of taking our pictures. The day's scheduled events went without a hitch. We stood in line for the sessions I was hoping to see and Jen was supportive and engaged with the spectacle that is NYCC. We met up with a co-worker who had come to the convention with his brother. He was surprised by the both of us, but seemed to take it all in stride. He took pictures of Jen and me, even making us kiss.

I was over the moon!

I am a very tactile and affectionate boyfriend. I like to kiss, hug and touch Jen as often as I can. Some of it may stem from insecurity and some from wanting to re-enforce my love for my partner. Some of it is because I love the physical connection. And some of it is because Jen is just so gosh darn attractive!

Why are you telling us this, Savannah?

I am telling you about this part of my personality because the Comic Con demonstrated one of the divides that Jen and I face as a gurl/girl couple. Because I am so physically passionate, it is very, very difficult for me to separate or compartmentalize my feelings for my girlfriend while I am dressed *en femme*. I still have the same feelings toward her while she is forced to look at a completely different person than the one she fell in love with.

It is not to say that Jen loves me any less when I am dressed as Savannah. She was willing to dress up in costume in support of me (and to have the experience). She was willing to be seen in public with me at a convention that boasts tens of thousands of visitors each year giving testament enough of her commitment to us. Even now, Jen continues to work toward her own balance of what a Savannah/Jen relationship looks like. She has held my hand and put her hand on my leg (and mine on hers), but a higher degree of intimacy will probably always be a work in progress.

Or, it maybe never realized at all.

It's all about balance. It's all about honest communication. It's all about each partner trying to understand the other's perspective, not just trying to force his/her own beliefs on the other. There was a sense of empowerment within us as we walked the New York City streets as powerful female superheroes. There was also disappointment with the new understanding that Jen didn't see me (or love me?) as her life partner while dressed. And there was the realization that we still had a long way to go in our development if Savannah and Jen were ever to become a *normal* couple.

CINDERELLA AT THE BALL

There is a private annual gala event each spring on Long Island hosted by Femme Fever for crossdressers, transgender individuals, their partners and admirers. Years before, after mustering enough courage to tell my previous girlfriend that I was intending to go, the event had been cancelled and had gone on hiatus for several seasons.

But now it was back on, like Donkey Kong!

Jen and I ordered custom dresses for the gala ball. Since it was a long awaited event for me, I ordered a sparkly dress with a flowing train and black opera gloves. I was excited and ready to go. This moment was years in the making and I was filled with anticipation of the event and the joy of sharing it with Jen. We booked a hotel room at the venue and planned to make a whole weekend out of it.

The gala was on a Saturday so we arrived Friday night. After settling in, there were vague plans to meet up with some of the other gurls. I dressed as Savannah and we headed down to the lounge. I was in my element and happy.

Without even a second thought, while we were heading toward the front desk to ask about another blanket for the room, I reached out to hold Jen's hand. She quickly pulled her hand away. For me it was instinctual and natural. To Jen, it was a moment of sheer panic, something she was totally unprepared for.

I was devastated.

After putting in the request for the blanket, we went to the bar. No one was there to meet up with. Additional disappointment took hold of me and took us back to our room. I quickly changed back into my boy clothes, taking off my wig and wiping off my makeup. It didn't seem worth it anymore to dress. The woman I love had rejected me.

That's a bit melodramatic, isn't it? Sounds like you were being a diva and a drama queen.

You are right, of course, dear reader. I was overreacting. Just because she wasn't ready to hold my hand in public didn't constitute a wholesale rejection of me (or my crossdressing). It represented the struggles she was working through. In a very selfish way, I had ignored so many obvious points. She was still coming to terms with understanding my dressing, was still worried about what other *normal* people might think about me (and us as a couple), and was dealing with the fact that a strange woman – not her boyfriend – was trying to hold her hand.

After I dressed down in the room, she asked why I had done so. She said that we still could have gone out for a walk or a drive or something. In spite of all of her fears and worries, she was still willing to support Savannah in some way. That simple act should have been enough.

But we gurls sometimes cannot see what we have. I was grateful that Jen had agreed to come with me to the ball. That was a heartfelt and heartwarming gesture. I wanted to show her my love and appreciation. Unfortunately, I found myself in a strange place. I was with the woman I love, but was forced to treat her like just a friend. I had to consciously remember that she was off limits in a more intimate way. So while I was wrestling with the idea of unrequited affection, Jen was struggling with the notion of being on a date with a beautiful feminine stranger (yeah, I said it... beautiful).

After some tears and discussions, we turned in and woke up fresh that next Saturday morning. As boyfriend and girlfriend, we checked out a local beachfront park and took in each other's company, the sun's rays, and a bit of food for the early part of the day. Eventually, we headed back to the hotel to get ready for the ball. We put on our gowns and headed down to the ballroom with our tickets.

We met up with my other gurlfriends, picked out a table, took pictures, and paraded around like silly prom dates. I quickly learned a few things, realizing that a dress train is a pain in the ass, that real women are way more comfortable without their heels, and that the gala ball was akin to fulfilling a fantasy for some gurls who do not have other outlets or opportunities to express themselves.

The event brought out all types. Well, not all types but several types that Jen had not seen in person before that night. Aside from the normal rabble of men in ball gowns and cocktail dresses there were over-the-top drag queens, some shiny body-suited babes, and even an older gurl in a way-too-skimpy red stretch tube dress.

One of Jen's fears was coming to fruition. Even though I had given her the seminar on some of the types of crossdressers across the transgender spectrum, Jen had purposefully put those other types out of her head. She had a fear that if she acknowledged those types of crossdressers it would mean that I fell into or would fall into one of those other fringe categories. She was trying to build a world where my crossdressing was to be accepted as the new normal in her life. To see so many other types of crossdressers and their intimate interaction served to overwhelm and put cracks into the veneer she had constructed for herself.

I could only counter by reminding her that some of these women had no other outlet for their femininity. Some were still discovering their sexual preferences and their gender identity. Jen was witnessing firsthand hundreds of people in their own degree of feminine expression.

The event went well, but it was all sensory overload for Jen. She went back to the hotel room and turned in after the lights came up in the ballroom. I opted to stay out with my gurlfriends for as long as I thought I could, just enjoying the freedom of being Savannah for a night.

As boyfriend and girlfriend, the next morning we ate a hearty breakfast at the local diner across from the hotel. We discussed what we had seen and heard during the weekend. Afterward, we made our way home to unpack and decompress. It was our opportunity to absorb everything that had occurred.

FEARS AND FLASH-FORWARDS

Since that time, Savannah and Jen attended a second Spring Gala Ball in which we were much more comfortable in our skins. We have had GNOs (girls' night out) with my other gurlfriends, dressed again (and again) for the New York Comic Con, and attended themed private parties on a monthly basis. She doesn't come with me all of the time, either due to scheduling conflicts, the fact that the venue may not be her thing (loud bars are not really conducive to chatting), or just to acknowledge that a man needs his gurl time.

We have grown in our understanding and appreciation of each other's perspective and opinions. But, of course, we continue to have fears about the present and the future. Some of those fears may be rationalized away. Some may dissipate with the passage of time. Some may haunt us for the rest of our lives.

My greatest fear is that Jen will discover that dealing with Savannah is too much of a hardship. I worry that she will feel that she could find another partner like me who does not have the additional baggage of Savannah in tow. I understand that I do take up a lot of closet space!

My other big fear is that Jen will never be able to see *me* under the makeup and finery. I love it when she says I am the prettiest girl in the room because it means that I am passable as a woman and that I don't look like my male self. But by that same notion, the fact that she can't see *me* may keep her from ever being comfortable enough to treat Savannah as the man she loves.

Jen has her own set of issues and fears. From battling the status quo and standards of normalcy, to fearing the harsh judgments, ignorance, and scorn of others, to wrestling with her own psychological limitations of acceptance and how far those lines can be blurred or pushed. She has plenty of angst to go around.

What is normal? Socially accepted behaviors change based on a person's upbringing, experiences, generational constructs, and culture. There is a fundamental difference in the acceptance of crossdressing between people born in Japan versus the United States. Where crossdressing has been part of the fabric of the culture in Asia, the same practice here in the States is more foreign an idea. And while crossplay is celebrated in other parts of the world, red-blooded Americans still have trouble rationalizing why a man would want to dress in feminine attire at all.

These factors create an environment ripe for judgment and to be seen as fetish or counter-culture. How is a woman who is in a relationship with a crossdressing male supposed to explain – or even defend – to friends and family her boyfriend's preferences? Especially when the behavior is something that maybe she can't fully understand. Even if she had a rational and logical argument to help champion her partner against all comers' judgment, the ability to sway hearts and minds is a daunting task.

Jen doesn't want me to suffer at the hands of others' disapproval. She worries about a relationship where I may be unwanted at family events because of who – or what – I am. She doesn't want me to be excluded due to an unwarranted or unplanned discovery. Jen, I think, worries more about the mobs with torches and pitchforks than I do. Some of it is fear and assumptions about people's worst nature. And we have stood witness to how people can treat each other based on hatred, ignorance, and disdain.

As Jen continues to support Savannah's right to exist, and comes to terms with Savannah as part of the fabric of her life, the new dynamic becomes the new normal. That is not to say that exposure breeds acceptance. Exposure may only result in tolerance. It is an open mind and the understanding that the man she loves still exists under the foundation; that the man she loves is actually a result of the man and the woman he is. Isn't that interesting? The man she fell in love with – the qualities that makes me who I am – is due directly to the woman I am.

But how can she love Savannah? Doesn't that make her a lesbian? Won't she be judged if she is out in public showing affection to you?

On this point, I have to admit I have no good answers. I would love Jen to treat Savannah exactly the same as she does when I am in my male form. I see her angst as a result of years of conforming to labels created around her. But Jen has every right to her feelings of discomfort if she detects that others may be staring at her (and us). I guess the question is whether one wants to live a conformed life based on the expectations of others or live a life where each moment is a new adventure.

Jen hopes to break through the fears that have shaped her. It calls for a high level of self-esteem. It calls for a strength that allows her to not care about outside opinions, if those opinions are derogatory to the life she hopes to live for herself and me.

Heck, there were even mental blocks for Jen to use the ‚proper' pronouns when together with others. It is not an easy thing to switch her brain to speak of me as a she and her versus a he and him. How do you rationalize telling a story about something we have done together as man and woman using the her pronoun simply because I am sitting in the booth next to her wearing a dress? It's not easy. But she puts in an extreme effort anyway because she knows it's important to me.

Jen is also becoming more comfortable uttering the word crossdresser in conversation when we are out in public. One time, we were in Kohl's when she pointed at a dress and mentioned that she had noticed that other crossdressers wore similar styles. I instinctively looked around to make sure we were out of earshot from the other customers

Jen is amazing. We now shop together for dresses for her and Savannah. She has no problem trying on something for me to get me an idea of how the dress could look on me. We have even bought two of the same dress and wore them to a private event. Who wore it best? It certainly wasn't me!

In our time together, Jen and I have both grown into more enlightened individuals. I have become more introspective and conscious of who I am and why I react to things the way I do. I am trying to channel my over-sensitivity and my own fears in a more positive manner. I am trying to better understand why Jen reacts the way she does. It is about metaphysically walking in her shoes to the point where I can be more objective about who I am through her eyes.

AND THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

Jen and I purposefully strive to understand our place in the world and our place with each other. We work to grow in understanding and acceptance. The journey is ongoing. To stop learning is to stop living. More answers should always lead to more questions.

The non-transitioning, non-fetish crossdresser may continue to be one of the last great gender identity unknowns. Will it ever be normal in mainstream society? In my case, I just want to live a positive life with Jen at my side where she appreciates and loves both my male and female sides in equal measure, where she sees changing from my male side into Savannah as nothing more than changing into a sweater on a brisk autumn day.

1.11. Jen, In Her Own Words

The real voyage of discovery consists not of seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

~ Marcel Proust

Ignorance is never better than knowledge.

~ Enrico Fermi

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

I have worked with Jen to tell the story of our lives together. I cannot claim that I transcribed all of the nuances correctly on her behalf so, in an effort to lift up and celebrate her voice, I am adding Jen's own words in this chapter. It's important to understand that our perception of events is not necessarily the perception of those around us. We color our understanding with our past experiences and blush it with our own bias.

When I read Jen's perspective for the first time, I was very emotional. Her story, in her own words, is a gift. It is a gift for her to share her struggles, her enlightenment, and her love for me. The only way I can repay her love is to continue to show her mine.

AS I RECALL

Savannah and I had been 'flirting' for a while. We knew each other through work. The day finally arrived where we were together outside the office. There was definitely chemistry there! We were „getting to know each other" when he pulled back and said those fateful six words that would change my world forever...

„I've got to show you something".

He sat back and started looking through his pics on his phone. He shows me one of him dressed up as a woman. I told him, „So? It's your Halloween costume."

(Side note, he and a fellow male co-worker had dressed up as „hookers" and were accompanied by two women who were their male „pimps". It was cute!)

He looks at me in a deadpan way and said „No, its not...".

I looked at him.

Looked at the pic.

Looked at him.

I was rendered speechless. Literally. I seem to remember my jaw flapping up and down but no sounds would come out, or coherent thought would form. I don't remember the exact words that came from him beyond that but I remember the gist of it.

„Ask me anything."

I had nothing.

He said, „OK, the usual answers...No, I'm not gay. No, I'm not transitioning..."

I couldn't process. I leaned in for a hug and kiss. I remember him saying, „OK, I see...shut up and kiss me."

I was in shock, I suppose.

Now it needs to be pointed out here, we were not a couple at that point. We were testing the waters. But it was there. That intangible something that lets you know on some level that this is NOT your typical short-term date. That this could be The One. So without knowing it, I knew it. Our afternoon tryst was short lived because he had „an engagement" that evening. We knew going in he would be only staying for an hour or so then it was off for this mystery evening he hadn't elaborated on.

But he did fill me in on his plans now. He had an evening scheduled with the gurls. His Savannah attire was in the car, he would be changing at his friends house then out for dinner and drinks. He did not cancel this evening.

That stung.

But who was I to say differently?

He asked if he could come back after his engagement. I said probably. He left.

I was in a fog.

I called my best friend.

Patty came over right away. She could hear something was off in my voice. We sat on opposite ends of the couch and she asked me what was wrong.

I spit it out.

And burst into tears.

She let me have my cry and then begrudgingly told me the story of HER former boyfriend. He was also a cross dresser of sorts, but of the fetish variety. It was all about sex. Kinky. He tried on several occasions to drag her into his roleplay. I believe she acquiesced on occasion. But it all left a bitter taste in her mouth about crossdressers in general.

She gave it a valiant attempt to persuade me to kick this guy to the curb. I couldn't do it though! I wanted to believe that there was more to it.

Long story short, she left for the evening and I got the text that „Savannah" was done and would like to come back.

I said yes.

More conversation ensued. I tried to put it in a pocket in my brain that him being a crossdresser was ok, but struggled with it. But I couldn't just walk away from what was between us either. So my solution was to be friends.

I needed time to process my feelings. Protect myself. Keep it casual.

Yeah. Didn't work. He was persistent and persuasive about wanting to make it work between us. So we carried on as a couple.

I set about the daunting task of trying to educate myself. I started reading. At that time I had a job that had a LOT of down time, and I was alone during that time. I was inhaling books.

And Savannah and I talked. He has a philosophy he lives by which is „Show, Not Tell" which served me well during this time. Slowly, a picture of a non-transitioning, crossdresser-next-door emerged. He just felt a need to express his feminine side. No more, no less.

I could live with that.

I still had to deal with the stigma associated with this new world. I had never thought of crossdressers before. Had someone mentioned the word, I immediately would envision flamboyant drag queens. The notion that there are men out there that just like to dress respectfully and have dinner or drinks together, go dancing, then go home and get back into their sweats was one that took work to wrap my brain around.

Eventually we had our first reveal, where I actually met Savannah in person. I insisted on watching the entire process. I wanted to see the evolution, not be shocked at the transformation. I didn't know it at the time, but in retrospect I could see I was actually slowly dipping my toes into this crossdressing pool. I needed baby steps to integrate the concept of Savannah into my life until it made sense.

So here was Savannah. He was very passable. Pretty. I told him so. I couldn't bring myself to think of him as a „her" yet. That would take a while. But it was nothing garish or drag queenish. It just...was.

It was almost anti-climatic... almost.

More processing ensued. He would sometimes get frustrated when months would go by and we weren't discussing any development, fearing I was in denial. Then we would take another baby step.

Going out.

There was a lot of fear with that. Mostly about what people would think. Of him. Of ME being with him. If memory serves, the first time we were out in public was with one of his crossdressing friends, Victoria. We went to dinner at a TG-friendly restaurant.

It was another „non-event" to add to my accumulating library of experiences in my brain. Little by little I began to relax.

These outings grew in scale.

I now attend monthly GNO (gurls night out) events that are usually anywhere from six to twenty crossdressers and a few of us genetic women (sometimes only me, sometimes there could be two or three of us). Apparently we are the „holy grail", cis-women who accept and respect our crossdressing mates and join them out in the world.

I have attended several of their monthly parties where they take over a local bar for a closed event. Then there's the annual Gala Ball. That was a little intimidating the first time.

What have I taken away from these? I won't lie and say ALL crossdressers are squeaky-clean. Anytime you get a large group together there will be ... shall we say... „colorful" ones mixed in.

But, overall? They are people that are trying very hard to show homage to women and their forms. They dress properly and make every effort to be as passable as they can. They carry themselves with pride and dignity. All they want is to be seen as what they are presenting as...a woman.

As a result of attending these parties and dinners, I have formed friendships and bonded with many of the gurls and their partners. I MISS them when I do not attend! My world has taken a polar shift from the early days.

Does this mean I am great with all things crossdresser?

Nope. I am still a work in progress.

The layers of this particular onion are many. I am still peeling them, and will continue to do so for a long time. Some days I have frustration, other days I am ok. I still worry about Savannah being discovered unexpectedly.

I am not a fan if he tries to wear a nightie to bed or around the house. I am not a fan of his shaving body hair. We work together to find compromise and a place where we can both get what we want though. It's not fair for me to tell him how to be in his own home, what to wear...just as it's not fair for him to expect me to be OK with stubble and seeing something that makes me uncomfortable.

It's still a mystery to me why I can see Savannah in all her splendor fully made up and be ok with that...but take the man under her and just throw a nightgown on him, and its awkward and uncomfortable. I've tried to explain it to him and myself...without much luck.

It's another layer of the onion.

At this point I am comfortable that the answers will present themselves when my overloaded brain is ready to receive them. I can be patient. He has „shown, not told" so much to this point. Actions definitely speak much louder than words.

I have heard from another woman that found out about the crossdressing and went immediately into acceptance. Now, a year or two down the road, those other more difficult emotions are cropping up.

I think if I were to offer any advice it would be to just BE. Experience the emotions. Follow the path as it lies ahead.

If you want to read,... read. Read till your eyes cross.

If you need to talk,... talk. Talk yourself hoarse.

Cry, get mad, isolate...just be. Let it happen.

I find I come out the other side of these emotions with a slightly shifted perspective BECAUSE I allowed these thoughts free reign in my head. If you have fears, by all means, bring them up. Allow your crossdresser the opportunity to say their peace on the subject. As many times as you need to hear it until you believe (or not).

Paradigm shifts occur when we least expect it. It creates shifts in your perspective, your thoughts, and ideas.

The key is to have an open mind. Don't judge before the jury is out.

Love,

Jen

1.12. The Last Crusade

We're born alone, we live alone, we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we're not alone.

~ Orson Welles

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

THE HOLY GRAIL

It is considered a myth; the fictional supportive and loving woman who wants to be with a crossdresser. They say these women do not exist (and who are they?). If there is one woman to be found, there can't be more than one in existence, right? If you are a real woman reading this book, you may be one of those people.

I am speaking now directly to the women reading this book.

You are not a myth.

You are real.

Jen is not the only woman dealing with a crossdressing man (that's me!). Within my own circle of friends in the crossdressing community, there are several couples just tryin' to work it out. In fact, I ran into three couples at the same event the other night and asked them, plus others, to share their stories with us, dear reader.

Each circumstance will be different. The way that each couple dealt with this pink elephant in the living room (or front room, if you're from the Midwest) will be different. The following testimonies will not capture the full spectrum of all of the twists and turns that you can expect as a crossdresser's partner, but they will illustrate the successes and struggles that real-life couples are going through.

First, let me apologize for all of us crossdressers.

I am really sorry we are all freaks!

Wait. What?

I am being facetious, of course, but many crossdressers believe that they are abnormal and not deserving of a true feminine identity. There are other cultures that accept crossdressing contemporaries. They go as far as to provide them their own gender class and celebrate them.

Partners, please keep in mind that it takes an almost insurmountable amount of courage to reveal our other selves to you. We risk it all in order to finally be the honest and open partner that you deserve.

All I can hope for is that these testimonies serve as exhibits to what couples can face and how obstacles can be overcome. A force of will does not determine success. It is gained through trials of fire. It is gained by opening up one's mind to appreciate another perspective. It takes understanding to realize that under it all we are just people, hanging onto and reforging that bond of love that should transcend above all else.

Partners of crossdressing men are a unique lot of women. They tend to be strong in their own individual way. They can be outspoken, have a surety of character, and have a ferocity in life about them. I believe that is why we are drawn to you as partners. We may not be able to articulate all of the reasons why we are attracted to you, but there is a measure of spirit and strength within you that shines brightly.

And in our crossdressing community, you, dear partner, should be celebrated for just showing up. You should be adored for being the evolved beautiful creatures you are – women that that can look beyond our facades and see into our true hearts and minds.

1.13. Other Stories – A Fairytale

Relationships aren't designed for selfish individuals.

~ unknown

A loving relationship is one in which the loved one is free to be himself to laugh with me, but never at me; to cry with me, but never because of me; to love life, to love himself, to love being loved. Such a relationship is based upon freedom and can never grow in a jealous heart.

~ Leo F. Buscaglia

_____

MELISSA AND ANNABELLE

Melissa is a late blooming crossdressing man with a history of trauma and a stern adolescent home life led by a domineering father. Although Melissa's father's hostility was broadly directed toward him in his teen years, he was treated very fairly as a young boy. Melissa's father valued his son's maleness while directing his scorn to Melissa's sisters. And since the sisters could not exact retribution against the father, they directed their sights on Melissa by dressing him up in their clothes.

Melissa's earliest memory of crossdressing was at age three or four. His sisters dressed him up as Annie Oakley for Halloween and took him around the neighborhood. Melissa will never know if he would have found an inherent impulse or compulsion to dress on his own, but as he grew up he did adopt an interest in crossdressing because he felt he had been indoctrinated to do so.

This led to repression and depression growing up. He was forced to deny the normalcy of how he was feeling about the act of dressing. Melissa did not fully comprehend that he had a full feminine personae until ‚the ripe old age of 46'. After six years of therapy (many crossdressers need qualified therapists to help resolve the fractures in their psyche), Melissa is now thriving in his duel identities and in his involvement in the crossdressing community. With therapy and much hard work, Melissa considers himself an advanced crossdresser with the skill set to move freely about in either persona when the desire strikes. He knows who he is and what he wants out of his feminine personae, after much struggle and self-examination.

Melissa's partner, Annabelle, is a divorced mother of four. She is a creative and fluid spirit, spending most of her adult career as both a dancer and a nurse. Her exposure to the crossdressing world is by way of her many friendships and acquaintances with gay men, drag queens, and the like. She is fully invested with Melissa in both his male and female sides.

But you said that crossdressers are not typically gay or drag queens. Are you back-pedaling, now?

Good catch, dear reader. I see you are paying attention!

Great job!

MISCONCEPTIONS

I mentioned Annabelle's resume for a reason. Her previous experience and close contact with people with different gender identities and sexual orientations allows her to inherently

understand them as people instead of just as labels. At the end of the day, the use of labels serves to bucket people into desirables and undesirables, allowing for people to rationalize a reason to dislike – or even hate – entire groups of people. It is a rationalization based on a single experience or vague understandings of what those people are about. In the end we are all just people, trying to live our lives.

Interestingly enough, in spite of her previous associations with people living alternative lifestyles, she still had plenty of misconceptions about what crossdressers are and are not. Annabelle met Melissa while he was hoping to schedule a dance class for crossdressers (and their partners).

Annabelle, before meeting all of us, thought that Melissa would be more flamboyant like the drag queens she knew. She also assumed that everyone was gay, since most of the drag queens she knew were. Those notions are difficult to shake off because those ideas have been so prevalent as labels for the typical, everyday crossdressing male.

TRUTH IS NOT SKIN DEEP

Melissa and Annabelle's story is a bit different from the others we will talk about. First of all, Annabelle met Melissa as Melissa. There was no secret life to be explained or revealed. There were no shocking discoveries of Melissa's feminine side after months of courtship (yeah, I said courtship instead of dating... I'm old-fashioned). The relationship originated with truth and openness, which is already a huge positive step. Annabelle had the opportunity to decide at the outset whether or not to pursue a friendship or a partnership with Melissa.

If you talk to Melissa and Annabelle you get two conflicting perspectives. While Annabelle is drawn to Melissa's kindness, generosity, and selflessness (her words!), Melissa is agape with the wonderment of why Annabelle would grace his life in the first place. What Melissa (and many of us) fail to understand is that the partners in our lives are not there because they are attracted to our Ryan Gosling looks, but the strength and quality of our character. They see the best in us while we see our faults. It is both our physical attributes and our spirit that make up the whole of us.

For Your Consideration ~

My dad once told me a story about how he perceived beauty when he was a man in his twenties. He had an uncle with what he initially described as a very plain and homely wife. His uncle doted on and adored her. After spending a couple hours being in the presence of his aunt's kindness and positively spirited personality, my dad left with the perspective that his aunt was much prettier than he initially realized. My dad started to understand that beauty was not just the cosmetics of what we see, but the qualities that make up the whole person.

It was an interesting story. As people, we tend to be attracted to the whole person, not just the façade we first see. Beauty can get us in the door, but it is our spirit and how we treat others that dull or illuminate that beauty.

Melissa mentioned to Jen and me that he was overly nervous for Annabelle to finally meet him as a man. He was worried that Annabelle would not be attracted to his male persona because she had only met him as Melissa. So, here we have the heel on the other foot, where the crossdresser is worried about acceptance from a possible partner because of the biology they were born into. That goes to show how we can be uncomfortable in our skin, whatever the clothing we wear.

Sometimes the clothing we wear can be freeing.

Sometimes it can serve as protective armor.

Sometimes it can be a prison sentence.

OPEN BOOK

Annabelle made the point that being with Melissa didn't change how she felt about her own sexual identity. She was initially a bit confused as she found herself attracted to Melissa since she has never had romantic inklings toward another woman or crossdresser. With a shrug of her shoulders, she says that she quickly got over that reservation and really hasn't thought of it since. She loves the person Melissa is inside, stating, „Outside doesn't really make a difference to me."

And that idea carries forward in most aspects of her life. She celebrates the things she loves. She has no fear about introducing Melissa to her family and friends. She knows she raised her girls to be open-minded, and she knows her friends are very modern and forward-thinking individuals. Annabelle doesn't care what the rest of the people think about her and her partner. She doesn't succumb to the judgment of others, nor does she suffer those who would cast ill will toward her.

On the other beautifully manicured hand, Melissa has no interest in revealing more about himself to his own family than is absolutely necessary. In his male life, only two people are aware that he is a crossdresser. He feels that sharing the knowledge of his feminine side wouldn't enrich his life or the life of the person that would be told. For him, there needs to be a compelling reason to reveal his whole self to others. And he hasn't found that reason yet. He understands that this reasoning makes him seem aloof and cold to some people, but he seems okay with that title.

Melissa and Annabelle agreed that it was okay for Melissa to reveal himself to Annabelle's daughters. Ironically, this systematically negates his own policy of only revealing himself to a select few. Maybe the issue is that Melissa would prefer to live an open life where he'll feel the most accepted, leaving the people of his past in the past. At any rate, he feels he is living a balanced life, both with his male and female identities and with his new relationship.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Today, Melissa and Annabelle bare their spirits to each other. Yes, that sounds cheesy. And you would be right. Their relationship is sickly sweet, and they are all the more adorable for it. Melissa is amazed and wonderstruck that Annabelle has total support and acceptance for him as a friend and partner. In fact, Melissa says that Annabelle accepts him more than he accepts himself, even after six years of therapy. That acceptance has been very disarming for

Melissa, allowing all aspects of their relationship to flourish. So much so that Melissa has found a level of love and intimacy that he had not experienced before or thought possible.

For Melissa, Annabelle's acceptance and love for him has allowed the pieces of his life to finally fall easily into place. It is not a struggle to make their relationship work. To hear Melissa say it, „Annabelle has shown me a reflection of myself..."

Partners who live with crossdressing men can have a chaotic existence. For Melissa, therapy allowed him to gain the courage to work on his transgender issues and figure out how to accept and incorporate his feminine side into everyday life. Annabelle's acceptance of him gives Melissa validation that maybe he is (and the rest of us are) just normal folk.

FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND

I asked both of them the question of what they felt the other would never understand about them. Annabelle is surprised that she constantly has to reaffirm her love for Melissa. She can't understand why she has to explain why she loves him so much. Melissa's biggest surprise is that Annabelle has such an easy time with his female side. He can't understand why Annabelle would love him. As Melissa told us, Annabelle is „...more accepting of me than I am." Annabelle scratches her head about why Melissa is so dense about the intangibles of her feelings and emotions for him, while Melissa points out more dire points of misunderstanding between crossdressers and their partners.

Melissa believes that a cis-female partner would have difficulty understanding the rationale that a crossdressing man could be confused by their gender. He goes on to add that one of the earliest concepts a person understands beyond their existence is their biology. A boy is a boy, and a girl is a girl. But I am a boy who likes to be a girl. It's most difficult to convey how disturbing and disruptive a confusion like that can be for a youth. And trying to get anyone else to understand that frustration – especially people who did not struggle with it – is no small feat.

For Your Consideration ~

It's easier to understand the above points if you draw parallels. We crossdressers can prattle on for hours about how we were drawn to our mother's or sister's clothes and how it just made us feel safe and comforted. Our partners, however, may not be able to comprehend that specific act or line of thinking. We can ask our partners if wearing a boyfriend's jersey or varsity jacket made them feel safe and loved. Do they love to wear an old pair of sweatpants or comfy knit sweater after the workday is done?

If the answer is yes, then you can start fostering an understanding of why clothing affects our moods and emotions, either by the escapism it provides or the memories it elicits through its feel or smell.

As for Annabelle's point, I blame Melissa for his lack of understanding. Yes, I put the blame wholly on his shoulders. He's a big girl. He can take it.

That's harsh!

Not really. Melissa knows I love to tease him.

Many of us live with the perceived shame of that which we are, even after we have accepted ourselves and how our feminine sides fit into our lives. I believe that the acceptance we have for ourselves is sometimes more of a resignation or tolerance for what we are, always hoping that we would eventually go back to what society deems appropriate. And if we cannot love ourselves for who we are and the qualities we possess, how would our brains ever acknowledge that others would be so willing to accept us for what we are.

WORDS OF WISDOM

In spite of Melissa's reservations about the how's and *whys* of Annabelle's affections for him, he does offer some pearls of wisdom from his own life experiences for how to share our feminine selves with our prospective partners. The following is simple advice but it should be understood that each relationship and participant is different.

Melissa talks about the decision to tell someone about being a crossdresser as a risk assessment exercise. How romantic, I would tell her with sarcasm. It is true that our crossdressing is probably the single most important facet to be divulged and shared. That being said, we have to be mindful of our partner and present the „all of us" to her in the best way. Never approach the process as if crossdressing is bad or as if you are revealing a terrible secret (even though it could be considered a terrible secret). Just try to lay out the information in a positive way.

For Your Consideration ~

Crossdressers, if you truly want a full and honest relationship with your partner, don't wait to tell them about yourself. Conversely, don't walk up to a beautiful women you are interested in at the bar and tell her that you crossdress as part of your pick-up line. The best course is to allow your partner to understand the kind of person you are. And you need to understand them.

Additionally, Melissa's only regret is that he let this aspect of his life go on for so long before deciding to invest time and energy to make that side of his life better. He regrets not having the inner strength to do something about Melissa's development at a younger age.

I would tell you that nostalgia is the first step to the path of regret. Do not dwell in the past because to do so is to forget that there is a present to live in. And don't worry about the future because it is always fluid and ever changing. The most detailed planning for the future can paralyze the present.

AND, IN CONCLUSION

Melissa and Annabelle both see the best in each other. They have a spirit of character that they demonstrate every day. They are an example of instant chemistry where they shared a desire to learn all they could about each other.

Melissa is a selfless and caring partner, always wanting to take away any obstacle from Annabelle's path. He is fierce in his loyalty to her, very protective of her happiness and security. Those qualities shine through very transparently and, of course, are some of the many reasons why Annabelle is attracted to him. They both kid about fairies (not a derogatory term for an

effeminate gay male) who replaced a Hoover almost overnight and who materialize a new LBDs (in one case, blue) at a moment's notice.

That's all sweet and gooey, but how do they deal with his crossdressing?

Ok... sorry, I was rambling.

For Melissa and Annabelle, there are no acceptance issues between them. They go out to both mainstream restaurants and private crossdressing events. They are a regular couple where Annabelle is just as happy to be with Melissa as with Melissa's male side. She holds no distinction between the two. In her words, „I don't care what you wear. It doesn't change who you are".

But every fairy tale is not all that interesting to the reader unless there is some sort of conflict. Their issues reside in the secrecy and status of their relationship. Annabelle's daughters have met Melissa in both male and female attire (and are fine with the fact that he is a crossdresser), but Melissa and Annabelle have kept under wraps the true nature of their relationship. They feel they need to wait until a more appropriate time for the reveal to the rest of the family. Melissa worries about how to handle a new dynamic for their finances, how a new family structure will unfold, and, you know, the usual issues that plague every red-blooded American couple.

Otherwise, they share a charmed life together.

1.14. Other Stories - Crosses to Bear

You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‚I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.‘

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

If you want to conquer fear, don't sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.

~ Dale Carnegie

DIANE AND EVA

Diane is a law enforcement officer. You know, one of those fields where crossdressing could be considered a bad thing? The brotherhood of police is still very much a boy's club, even in today's climate. There is plenty of hazing throughout the ranks. But as long as you go along, you get along.

He is quiet as Diane, with a shyness and reserved quality about him. He grew up in the boroughs of New York City, living with his parents and sister in a two-bedroom railroad box-style apartment. As a child he was lucky enough to sleep in the master bedroom while his younger sister got the smaller bedroom and his parents relegated themselves to sleeping in the dining room.

Diane grew up with an admiration of his mother's quiet sacrifices to the family. He also admired his maternal grandmother's dedication and devotion to her own husband. Diane found that these women possessed a truly honorable and intangible quality that let them sacrifice for the greater good. He also envied that women could show other women tenderness with personal contact, able to drop their defenses and share honestly with each other.

When he entered into puberty, Diane was drawn to his mom's clothing and to her girdles, in particular. Was he trying to capture his mother's spirit by wearing her clothes? Did he believe that there could be transference of energy from the fabric? He didn't understand the reasons why he was drawn to his mother's things. All things sexual or sensual were still a mystery to him.

Diane grew up in the pre-Internet era, before the rites of becoming a man were spoken of openly. He is a stoic person, not looking to ask the questions, either. He felt foolish around women, always unsure of what he should be doing socially and intimately. He wasn't a bar scene player; his friends were the ones to set him up on dates. None of those girlfriends went the distance.

But something changed. While on vacation with friends, he passed up a chance to pursue a beautiful Jersey Girl because of his insecurities. He did, however, have an instant and comfortable connection to another girl living in that locale. The awkwardness he usually endured was replaced with easiness and a calm he had not experienced before.

Diane's partner Eva is a career mother and therapist. She has spent a lifetime building a family and a body of work. She is direct and honest in conversation, unafraid to speak her

mind. And she can also cut loose on the dance floor all by herself when her favorite 80s jam comes out da DJ's speakers. It's a great combination.

She has worked for years intently hearing her patients' words, looking to uncover and understand what keeps them from living a fulfilled life. She has even heard tales from partners of crossdressers and had to offer them counsel on what steps to take next.

THE HANGED WOMAN

After they married, Diane's urge to crossdress subsided for a time. But, as with many of our kind, there were cycles of purging and of buying again. Diane spent years trying to stifle his crossdressing, controlling his life, and his wife. There were some very dark times during those years. So dark, in fact, he held a fantasy where he was in the World Trade Center on September 11th when the buildings came down. That way he would have simply blinked out of existence, labeled as a hero. His secret would have been vaporized along with him and his family would have been taken care of.

Diane hated the man he was. He despised the choices he had made. He used the analogy that Eva was like a woman at the end of a hangman's noose. If you tighten the knot in the right way and place it at the correct point on the neck, the fall will instantly kill the victim. If not, the fall will only succeed in a slow strangulation. Diane felt that he was cutting off the breath of the health of his relationship with Eva, serving only to cause Eva pain and hurt.

Eva had taught Diane about the world. He had never gained that knowledge on his own growing up. In spite of expanding his understanding of the world, he continued to live in a constrictive vacuum because of his alter ego. For years, they argued as Diane tried to control every aspect of their relationship.

The figurative noose was tightening itself around Eva's neck as the perpetuation of Diane's secret added stress to their relationship. In addition, their church's teachings and society's opinion on crossdressing served to reinforce that what he was doing was wrong. In spite of all the reasons that kept him from sharing his secret, Diane found his decision to keep silent more and more deplorable. It was an internal conflict that caused him to go to many dark, empty places.

FROM THE FRYING PAN

So imagine Eva's surprise when, after thirty-two years of marriage and a very stressful personal tragic event, she found out about Diane's crossdressing. It all came to a head one evening in the bedroom when Diane uttered those often-used words, „I have something to tell you".

This type of knowledge is enlightening, but only initially and in a limited way. The crossdresser's admission illuminates the whys of his sometimes odd behavior. The whys of clothing being in the wrong place, blouses being stretched out, remnants of makeup on the counter, or the strange discoveries of feminine accessories, etc. This admission comes with the terrible new knowledge that the crossdresser has lived a lie and kept a serious secret.

And what a whopper of a secret it is. Eva didn't have any inkling that what her husband was doing was in the realm of possibility. Sure, some behavior was now explained away but

other harsher paranoia crept in. If he was this adept at hiding his feminine side for all these years, then he must be a master of manipulation and a lord of lies. That is a difficult logical argument for a crossdresser to refute. Yes, it is true that most of us have become very skilled at keeping this specific secret from judging eyes and unwanted attention. Just keep in mind that this secret was and is an act of self-preservation and, maybe, shame, not of deception with the intent of malice.

From Diane's point of view, he considers Eva akin to a victim of a crime. In his experience, the victims of crime take a back seat to the investigator's focus on the crime itself. Eva lived ignorant of the identity of Diane for years. Now she was saddled with an influx of knowledge laced with more questions than answers, fears of what other secrets have been kept from her, and the realization that there was now a third person in their relationship.

COMMISERATION

Eva was now an accessory after the fact for the lifelong lie that Diane had orchestrated during their marriage. Now Eva knew... and was instantly forced to keep the same secret.

Who does she have to talk to?

Indeed, whom did she have to turn to? She could talk to her daughter who had discovered Diane years earlier. The two of them could commiserate about Diane, but Eva's daughter had her own burden to bear for the secret she had been forced to keep. Eva's daughter had told her sister because the secret was too big and arduous to carry alone. And she couldn't tell her mom something that should come from her dad. So who else?

A close friend of the family, Dawn, was going through her own problems with a troubled marriage and called Eva often to vent her anger and hope for sympathy. She would tell Eva that she was so envious of what Eva and her husband had in their more-perfect marriage. While Dawn was lamenting all of the details of her difficult relationship, Eva could only offer generalities about the problems she also was going through.

Eva asked Diane to tell Dawn the truth so that Eva would not have to stilt their conversations. Diane agreed, but the opportunity for the reveal came and went without execution. Eva's tenuous trust in Diane took a hit as a result; she was feeling betrayed that he didn't physically follow through with his promise.

On a positive note, once Eva and Diane started venturing out together she did meet other married couples facing the same situation in their own relationship. They attended group meetings where they could share their story and hear the trials and tribulations that other couples were facing. It helped Eva to realize that her problems were not unique and that she could lean on others for advice and empathy.

For Your Consideration ~

It is important to note that words are just words. If those words are not supported by actions, they become meaningless. And if more promises are given without action, those words become bigger daggers of mistrust and doubt.

STAND BY YOUR MAN

Jen and I met them for the first time at our second Femme Fever Gala Ball weekend, sitting next to Diane and Eva at Applebee's during lunch. At the time, we thought they were a stable crossdressing couple. What we didn't know is that Eva had just found out about Diane mere months before. But here she sat at a long table lined with crossdressers (and some partners), out in the daylight for the world to see... or at least other patrons that would never know them in real life.

One of the things we crossdressers sometimes forget is that our partner is always going to be who she is. While we crossdressers can hide under our makeup and counter-intuitive feminine clothing, our partners are faced with the issue of simply being themselves. What if you go out to a local restaurant as a couple and happen to run into old friends who recognize your partner straight away? It doesn't take long for them to connect the dots.

IF
Partner A is out with Girlfriend B
AND
Girlfriend B looks similar to Husband C of Partner A
THEN Girlfriend B is Husband C.

I think it may be Einstein's theory of femininity.

Jen, who was also new to the idea of facing the sunlight with a crossdressing partner, felt inadequate as she and Eva spoke. Eva appeared so at ease with Diane as they perused the menus and talked about what to order, while Jen was struggling with her acceptance of me and us as a public couple.

Eva may have seemed at ease, but she was dealing with her anger and fear. For one, she was not the first to know about Diane. As I had mentioned earlier, her daughter already knew, catching Diane dressing at their home four years earlier. Having only seen a glimpse of Diane, this young woman thought that her dad was having an affair with this new woman. Diane was forced to admit that he was *that woman*.

On a side note, Diane mentioned to us that he was happy to have come away unscathed from his daughter's discovery of his femininity. Diane left his daughter to her own thoughts and struggles to understand what she had witnessed. Selfishly, Diane did not pursue other conversations with his daughter; did not try to delve deeper into helping his daughter with her peace of mind. It is one of Diane's regrets where he had talked himself into believing that everything was fine.

Finally, four years later after a tragic and unexpected death in the family, Diane found he was sick of the lies he had told and the secrets he was keeping. He was devastated and couldn't keep who he was to himself anymore. With sincerity and conviction, Diane told Eva about his crossdressing. Eva listened to her husband with her whole heart, knowing that the words her husband spoke were the truth.

The words were sincere and filled with pained emotion. In spite of her fears and reservations, she looked at her husband with fresh eyes – maybe clinical eyes – and decided to support her husband's activities.

To Eva he was a good husband, a good provider, and a good father. She thought that she owed it to Diane to be a good wife. Was it her years as a therapist and the stories she had listened to from the patients on her couch that gave her a softened and supportive perspective? Was it a fear of losing what she had built over the years? Was it an interesting and novel experiment?

ADULT NOVELTIES

In fact, it was a novel and interesting experiment between them for a time. The relief of finally sharing a terrible burden allowed Diane to be more present and calm. Eva, without understanding the magnitude of what her husband's crossdressing meant, got a kick and kinky pleasure out of their romantic exploits. They went shopping together for clothes and wigs where Eva got to pretend that the articles for purchase were for her, not her husband. It was a risqué and adventurous time.

But that interest and excitement faded – as with many new toys. One day, Eva was kissed by Diane and became confused and conflicted. She didn't like the fact that she was kissing another woman – faux or otherwise. Eva didn't consider, or want to consider, herself a lesbian. Her crossdressing husband didn't turn her on when he was wearing lingerie or a dress. She wanted her man to be a man, have hair on his body, and be her husband.

Diane wanted to be smooth, so the negotiations started. Where do you draw the line? The lines are different for different couples. You have to be conscious of supporting the other's needs as well as your own. In the case of Diane and Eva, he was able to shave all over, with the exception of a certain manly attributed area south of the border.

On a vacation to a warm climate, Eva worried that everyone would be staring at Diane's shaved legs. She feared the judgment and questions that she would have to explain away with more lies. In the end, those fears were baseless as no one noticed or even cared enough to ask about his lack of hair.

THE GREATEST FEAR

But other fears are always lurking in the back corners of the mind; always simmering under the surface of an otherwise calm pond. During our interview, Diane was very direct and honest when offering a perspective that he hoped would help other struggling couples. During that first year of exploration and public appearances, they went to a week-long event in Provincetown called Fantasia Fair. The floodgates for their emotions were opened wide.

During that seven-day event, the crossdressers had the freedom to dress all week, day and night. To Eva, the event was a sacrifice that she had made for her husband so that he could be comfortable and happy. It was all going to be about Diane that week. And it was all about Diane... for a while.

During segregated breakout meet and greets, the crossdressers and other alternative gender identified individuals grouped together. Diane was experiencing a sense of euphoria,

finally in a safe and accepting environment. There were so many other crossdressers to interact with; so much time to enjoy the freedom of presenting as a woman.

Eva and the other partners met, too. They shared their stories, fears, and heart-wrenching struggles. The cork of their pent-up emotions popped and the tears of pain, frustration and gratitude were wholly unleashed.

Once the couples were brought back together in a later session, Diane, after seeing his wife and the other partners, realized that his enjoyment of his feminine freedom came with a huge emotional cost that Eva was continuing to pay. Diane, in his telling of his secret to Eva and their subsequent exploration, didn't realize (or want to acknowledge) that the secret shared wasn't shared equally. Diane had unburdened the shame of all of his secrecy; by adding it to Eva's already taxed shoulders. At the end of the week, everyone came together for the last session of the event. In this forum, they were afforded the opportunity to say how they felt or what they had learned. Diane stood up and acknowledged that he would be happy to get back to his male life for a while, feeling overwhelmed by the excessive amount of time spent as her that week. During the exit from the conference room, a transsexual woman approached him. She grabbed his arm and declared „...this was not the end for Diane", that Diane would „...want much more".

This woman's words scared him. What did it mean to him? Was Diane being obtuse in his belief that crossdressing was all that he wanted, that he would never want to transition to a female later on? Diane admitted that he had become adept at only seeing what he wanted to see and ignoring everything else. He likens the feeling to the Simon and Garfunkel song, *The Boxer*, where they sing „...a man hears what he wants to hear, and disregards the rest."

Hearing these words from her husband's mouth was the realization of one of Eva's fears. Now, she was finding this out for the first time in front of Jen and me. Eva pointed out that they should have had this conversation in private. Eva told him she expected honesty and disclosure from her husband. She told him she needed to be a part of the discussion, not just a recipient of decisions made. Hearing that the transsexual woman's words had so impacted Diane caused Eva to well up with anger and fear. Her resentment at being lied to for years was validated with what she considered more deception.

OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

The tension between Eva and Diane was palpable. I reiterated what I interpreted that they each said. Jen answered Eva's question, „What do you think of this? Is it fair?" with „It is unfair to hear it this way, but remember that in the end you have control to make the decision to stay or go." We wanted to make sure that they realized that we were honored that Diane felt safe and comfortable enough to speak up about his fears on the subject, and respectful of Eva's feelings of fear on the subject matter.

For Your Consideration ~

Please understand that trying to discover who we are as crossdressers is an impossible task if you can't take a serious hard look inside yourself.

After that evening, Eva and Diane spent several weeks discussing the issue of male-to-female transitioning. For Eva, it is an absolute that she be given an equal voice in the relationship. She is Diane's wife, an equal partner in all matters. She has the right to decide what she is willing to commit to. It is her choice whether to stay for *the death do us part* part, or to decide to leave in pursuit of her own fulfilled life. She didn't sign up for having a part-time girlfriend... so thinking about a full-time version raises all of its own issues and consequences.

Eva doesn't want to look back on a life half-lived. She worries that a time may come when she discovers that she has been duped into believing in her husband's lies. Ignorance may not be lying. Lying to yourself, however, can hurt those around you.

COMMUNION

Another interesting note is Eva's perspective of intimacy with Diane. After that initial run of risqué adventure with Diane and the subsequent intimate backpedaling due to Eva's discomfort of being with another woman, Eva continued to offer intimate moments to her husband's alter ego.

Why?

Although not turned on by the feminine presentation of Diane, Eva feels that it is important to show Diane affection and physical interaction. She does it out of love for her husband and for the life they have built together. There also might be a little fear that if she doesn't, Diane could seek that intimacy outside the marriage. By doing so, Eva is exhibiting that feminine selflessness that Diane so admires.

For Your Consideration ~

I was skeptical about Eva's reasoning because I am always concerned if my partner is doing something out of obligation. I believe forced obligation leads to resentments. Jen told me to look at it a different way. She says that doing something out of a sense of obligation can be performed because of their love for their partner. In a relationship, we all sacrifice something to make our partner happy. We freely give of ourselves to demonstrate our affection.

ANTIQUATED NOTIONS

Eva doesn't want to hold back Diane, but she doesn't want Diane to hold her back, either. The years of just accepting whatever the situation was in their marriage is over. Diane, in his attempts to control his own life, controlled Eva's life by keeping her ignorant of the household finances, investments, and decision-making. Diane's crossdressing secret caused a stranglehold on the relationship, keeping every facet of it as precise as possible. The pressure of controlling the relationship helped to fracture it. With Diane's admission and a newfound (or rediscovered) sense of self, Diane and Eva continue to talk it out, hug it out, and do whatever else they need to do to make their new dynamic work.

MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

We have met up with Diane and Eva at GNO dinners at TG-friendly restaurants. They attend private Long Island events and the annual Femme Fever Gala Ball. Eva is the more outspoken one when talking about their relationship, quick and happy to share their trials and tribulations. Some of their issues are universal to all relationships involving crossdressers and their partners.

One of Eva's complaints is of being mistaken for a crossdressing man. She is woman... hear her roar! What self-respecting cis-woman wants to be looked over and be thought to be a crossdressing or transitioning man? In a sea of crossdressers, the real women may feel they fall short in their own feminine presentation. How in the heck do you compete with men who put hours into their expression? How do you compare transsexuals who have better breasts than you do?

Eva was shocked at her resentment toward Diane for taking ninety minutes or more to get ready to go out. Eva had been previously happy to whip herself together in ten to twenty minutes. Now, she started to wonder about the efforts she was putting in for herself. Eva said she „...was shamed into taking better care of herself".

For Your Consideration ~

Comfort may breed complacency. Why try to put in the extra effort when you have already secured your man?

Crossdressing men are in constant pursuit of the ultimate feminine expression. We woman-watch to see what they are wearing, how they wear it, and how to incorporate those elements into our own presentation.

Women, be the best you can be. Do not do it for others but for yourself. Crossdressers only wish that they could be feminine like you in the easy way that you can. Regardless of your weight, age, or shape, you are always going to have the natural attributes to be something that we cannot achieve without hard work.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

What does Eva want from their relationship as they move forward into an uncertain future? She is looking for honesty and respect. She hopes that she and Diane can be happier in all aspects of their relationship. She wants them to be able to have fun and lead a more carefree existence. She wants less arguments, secrets, and tension. In a nutshell, Eva wants her husband Diane to be her best friend. For Diane, he strives to understand how to be a better husband, *woman* and partner. He still wants to become that devoted and selfless partner that he saw his mother and grandmother be all those years earlier.

Diane and Eva want what all couples want in their relationship when they look back on the phases of their lives together. They want to have what they had at the beginning. They want to recapture that passion and love that instantly connected them all those many years ago under a summer sun on tropical beach sand.

What had they lost?

They want spontaneity, passion and love for life and for each other. They want a selfless idealism about the world that has suffered and eroded over the years. The decay of those

positive parts of themselves led to them to forget the reasons why they loved life – and why they loved each other.

Diane's crossdressing secret was at the nexus of troubles that contributed to their relationship's state of emergency. His obsessive-compulsive disorder played its part to add tension to their union. The passing of time, the passing away of parents, the rigors and joys of having children, the typical complacencies that descend on any relationship of great length, taking each other for granted... all fester and grow in the corners of any marriage spanning decades. It is not unique to only couples dealing with crossdressing.

Over the years, Diane's secret made his life more interesting and exciting. Because he found that he didn't really like the man who stared at him in the mirror each morning anymore, he hid that face behind foundation and a wig to escape his existence for a few hours at a time. But during the return to manhood, Diane felt guilty and dirty about his pleasure. He felt he was cheating on Eva.

Diane wants to erase the hurt he has caused his wife, and not be an instrument of additional pain as they move forward. He wants them to remember that spontaneity they once shared before this secret, his OCD, and disillusionment started to crush their spirits. He wants to understand women; to understand how they can be so selfless and sacrificing. Diane believes there is something of purpose in their future. Just as they used to volunteer and help others, he feels that there is something from their current truth that can assist others facing the same dilemmas.

Can these dreams be something that can be actualized beyond the simple act of hoping? I believe there is always hope... and that hope can be realized. It just takes commitment, perseverance and understanding. In Eva's own words, „If there is true understanding and awareness, change can be made."

1.15. Other Stories – Late To The Party

Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.

~ Albert Einstein

Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.

~ Marcus Aurelius

DEBRA AND EDEN

Debra is a jeweler in his 60s who discovered at the age of ten that there was such a thing as crossdressing men. He saw a photograph of a beautiful woman in a newspaper (you know, that thick paper that is filled with articles, sports stats, and comic strips?). Then he read the caption under the photo that said that the woman was a female impersonator. Debra was captivated that a man could look so desirable and alluring.

Prior to that moment, Debra was unaware that a boy could or should dress as a girl. In the coming weeks and months, he started to find himself drawn to the tights and underwear of his older sister. Unlike me, he never dared to break the sanctity of his mother's dresser drawers.

He never looked back. Pantyhose and panties were his clothing of choice. They provided him with both comfort and sexual release. Debra continued in this way for most of his life, only the sexual component waning in recent years.

In marriage he hid his femme accessories in the bottom of his closet and in the garage, where prying eyes would never find them. Any time he had a few hours in an empty house, he would put on his panties, slide the pantyhose up his legs, and be in bliss.

Debra wife, Eden, is a woman also in her 60s, although she looks a bit younger than her years denote. She and her sister were a bit nomadic in their youth, bouncing around from house to house due to an ever-changing family dynamic. Eden is a mother of two beautiful married girls, one of them with a child. But those are just statistics.

Like Eden from the Old Testament, Eden thirsts for knowledge. She is a reader with a love of gothic horror. Eden wrote her thesis on Edgar Allan Poe. She finds H.P. Lovecraft's work grotesque and fascinating. Bags full of books are stored in her basement from years of enjoyment.

Eden was a career woman in her early adult life. She thought for a moment to pursue a career in law, but decided on going into the publishing field instead. She worked for a major magazine for seven years before finally giving it up to bring up their two daughters.

When the girls were older, Eden did not return to the world of publishing but did find satisfaction with a decade of work in children's retail and then ten years as a medical secretary. She always found something to keep her mind and body busy, even volunteering at her synagogue for many years. By October of 2015, Eden had decided that maybe retirement was her next adventure.

BOILING POINT

In a snowy January of 2016, Eden's daughter was deep into her pregnancy. There was a threat of a massive snowstorm. Eden, perhaps with a woman's and a mother's intuition, felt a need to go into the city to be with her daughter. It was lucky she did because her daughter soon went into labor.

Eden called Debra, who worked in the city, to see if he wanted to come over. Worried that his car may be stuck in drifts of snow if left in the Long Island Railroad parking lot, Debra decided to fetch it and stay home alone that night.

Debra spent that night dressed. But he was not just wearing the panties and pantyhose that had been his mainstay for over 50 years. Five years prior, Debra found that it wasn't enough to just dress in those things. He started ordering more clothes and having them delivered to work. He would bring them home, hide them until Eden was out of the house, and try on whatever outfits he had purchased. Debra hadn't advanced to applying makeup, but was dressing more completely. Maybe due to psychological or hormonal changes, his sexual need to dress had diminished as he explored this new level of femininity.

Debra did go to the hospital on Sunday to be with the family and see his first grandchild. Eventually, he and Eden found themselves home again with the new identities as grandparents. That changes a person. There is an appreciation of life being drawn into the world. There is a sense that things are changing. Time is passing. The frailty of life is more evident.

Even before the birth of his grandchild, Debra had become increasingly distant in his relationship with his wife. With Eden's retirement and his dressing escalation, he felt trapped and unfulfilled with his advancing femininity. Debra's opportunities to dress had decreased and his frustration had increased. He wanted to tell Eden about the dressing, but kept losing the courage to speak the words.

Critical mass was imminent.

Finally, in April, Debra was able to utter those dreaded words, „I have something to tell you that is going to rock your world." Eden braced for the worst news she could imagine – cancer, foreclosure, lost savings, an affair, or the want of a divorce. But none of those things were true.

Debra revealed that what he had been doing for all of those years was wearing panties and pantyhose. He admitted that he was now dressing more completely. Eden's reaction was one of relief. None of the terrible possibilities she had dreamed up in her panic were true. The revelation of her husband being a crossdresser seemed like a blessing in comparison.

But Eden needed to brace herself again as the floodgates of new information opened. Debra revealed his hiding spots in the closet and the garage. He showed Eden the things he was wearing when she was out of the house and gave her a history of his dressing over the years.

SHIFTING DYNAMICS

So, how did Eden handle the reveal?

Eden and Debra both admitted that their married life had lost its luster over the last several years. Of course, this can happen to any relationship or marriage after decades together. We lose focus on our spouse. We forget to have gratitude and a love for the beautiful creature before us. We become comfortable and complacent.

In the case of many (probably most) crossdressers who keep a secret for so long from their partners, the sharing of the secret is like an anchor lifted off their hearts and minds. As the partner expresses their love and support for the tortured crossdressing man in their life, a rush of air finally escapes and the pressure that had been building finally hisses out to dissipate in the room. Debra felt lighter now that the secret was shared.

Eden, after so many years with Debra, was relieved that crossdressing was the worst the reveal included. She embraced her husband and told him that it would be all right. Eden was a woman with close gay relatives. She had sympathy for this new Caitlyn Jenner who wasn't able to live as her authentic self until so late in life. Eden understood all this and wanted her husband to feel accepted.

But Eden's reality was still rocked, as we can all imagine it would be after forty years of marriage. Eden set up the ground rule that she did not want to see Debra, relegating to the bedroom when her husband was dressed. Slowly, that restriction softened to having Debra give Eden notice when he wanted to dress so that she could be prepared. Eventually, that was abolished to allowing Debra to dress in the house whenever he wanted. Eden said it like this in the interview; „She should be able to dress when she wants. It's her house, too."

And while all of these ground rules were being refined, Eden went back to doing what she loved to do... read and learn. She started using the Internet to educate herself on the subject of crossdressing men. She downloaded book after book on the subject, trying to pinpoint where Debra fell on the spectrum of the transgender community.

Unfortunately, as with most things, crossdressing is not an easy thing to categorize. Debra had a lifelong pantyhose fetish that only had recently morphed into a full feminine identity. He had slid through more than one crossdressing category. Even during the interview, he acknowledged that his femme name was only a necessity because he needed a first name in order to fill in an online profile for a crossdressing site.

Debra and Eden debated and argued the merits of who should be told about *her*. Do the daughters need to know? Is it going to be a problem if the daughters decide to tell their husbands? What about Debra's older sister of whom he had borrowed her tights and panties years ago? Eden needed a have a support system for herself and her wellbeing (since there still is a scarcity of active support online or locally for the significant others of crossdressers). Reading will only take you so far, and that reading will present you with two more questions for every one it answers.

Shameless plug: Please visit LivingWithCrossdressing.com for more resources and support.

When Jen and I met Eden, we were surprised that she was so elated to meet us. Not because we are extraordinary people (although we are!), but because Eden thirsted for interaction with others who understood what she was going through. In fact, Eden started

firing off questions to us as soon as we sat down to the wonderful lunch she prepared for us. We gave Eden and Debra all the information we had based on our own relationship struggles and successes. It was a good afternoon for sharing and fellowship.

TRUTH BE TOLD

As with any secret that is finally revealed, there is both an upside and a downside. The crossdresser is finally baring his soul to his partner about this secret shame, having that weight lifted off his chest. The partner finally starts to understand his true nature. The downside comes in the feelings of betrayal. She thought she knew him. After the dust settled and the shock dissipated, she was now going through her own stages of grief.

Debra was surprised in many ways by Eden's reaction to his revelation. He was floored by her acceptance of his crossdressing, but he was also surprised by her subsequent feelings of anger. Now that he had finally revealed himself to her – and that she accepted him – Debra thought that everything was okay. He did not understand why Eden could have such anger in her heart as a result of his admission. He failed to understand that, in spite of their history and love, this was something new to be processed.

Eden was, of course, supportive of the husband she loved. If crossdressing was the worst admission that Debra had to share, it was something that Eden felt she could rally back from. She sympathized with a person struggling with his own identity and with the burden of not being his true self. In fact, she started to push Debra to crossdress when there was an opportunity at night, frustrated that Debra was not taking advantage of the new time available to dress.

For Your Consideration ~

It is common for crossdressing men to just be not in the mood to dress from time to time. It does take a lot of preparation for some of us to transform and sometimes we are just too lazy or tired to put the effort in. It's like taking a 12-hour road trip to visit family for an afternoon. You really want to see your folks, but the effort to do so just doesn't make it seem worthwhile.

The realization that her husband kept this knowledge from Eden for so many years was sobering. Why had he felt the need to keep his crossdressing secret from her? As with other couples, where the revelation comes after so much time has passed, the women can feel that they never truly knew their partner at all. As Debra showed Eden all of his hiding spots for his feminine clothes, Eden's thoughts start racing about what else he had kept from her.

Was he really sick that day when the family was getting together or was it an excuse to stay home to dress?

Is the dressing more important to him than she is? Is he being honest about other facets of his life?

Eden worried that Debra continued to hold something back, believing that Debra had other secrets to be revealed when he felt pressed to share them. There may be good or bad reasons to withhold information, but Eden felt she deserved to know all there was to know.

One time Eden found a text message on Debra's phone. It was an ongoing correspondence with another crossdresser where risqué digital pictures had been exchanged. What did this mean in relation to Debra's crossdressing? Was there an attraction to other crossdressers beyond simple envy and admiration? Was Debra bordering on something more sexual with another crossdressing man?

As a result of this new private message discovery, Eden's affection toward Debra had diminished. They lived under the same roof, comfortable enough with each other after four decades of marriage. As our interview hit the third hour we did note them curled up together on the other end of the sectional couch.

Eden was already struggling with one admission by her husband. Now she had to deal with this second discovery of a more sexual nature. It supported her initial fear of what crossdressing was all about. Eden felt she would be forced to discover more, learn more. Is this just the tip of the iceberg of the secrets that Debra had inside? Were there more truths to be told? She didn't think so until she read those text messages.

So, there was more processing and conversation to be had.

There was more trust to rebuild.

For Debra, he held another shared secret. That is the one of unresolved shame. He considered what he had done through the years reprehensible. The act of sexual release by wearing women's underwear, to him, was wrong. It was a compulsion that he could never shake. The shame drove the secrets deeper. If one cannot embrace their own thoughts and make peace with them, how could someone else see those thoughts as anything but utterly despicable?

Debra has a ways to go in self-acceptance, especially since he has emerged more fully as Debra in both name and physical identity. He needs to understand what he wants out of the experiences and where he wants his journey to lead. And Debra needs to share those thoughts with Eden in an honest way if there is to be hope for a stronger partnership between them.

Eden wants to be able to make her own choices with the best information available. To believe that this situation is happening to her – not with her – makes Eden question just how important she is to Debra in the vast scheme of their relationship.

COPING MECHANISMS

Debra and Eden cope day to day in their relationship and their own individual mental health. Eden has her daughters to confide in. And her daughters are supportive of both of their parents, wanting their parents to be happy and their father to be safe when he is out in public.

By May, Debra had his first full makeover at FemmeFever on Long Island and finally discovered what a fully realized Debra could look like. While Debra will always have a desire and love for his pantyhose – they serve as both something sensual and as compression support while on his feet all day at work – he prefers to dress as a more complete woman when the opportunity arises.

Eden went with Debra to the Fantasia Fair in Provincetown where they spent every day with Debra dressed *en femme*. They met other couples that were experiencing the same issues in their own marriages. Eden wants to go out with Debra to local events but fears they may cross paths with neighbors or friends. She also doesn't attend the monthly private events, wanting Debra to have some freedoms without him feeling like he is being held back.

Eden wishes that there were more resources out there to help her cope. In spite of her love for her husband, the shock and anger inherent with discovering this truth after being together so long under such pretense requires outside support. There are CDSO (crossdresser significant others) groups out there in some metropolitan areas and online, but they are not as active and current as they could be. Plus, every situation is unique for the crossdresser and for the dynamic of the relationship with their partners. If and when you get a response from one of these groups, the answer may not be received as quickly as your reeling mind and aching heart requires or you may not get a satisfactory answer to your question at all. Eden would love to have found a CDSO group that could have been moderated by both an active crossdresser and a significant other of a crossdresser.

After a year, Eden is still coping with who her husband is. It is not a 24/7 effort anymore. She has her good days of acceptance and bad days where her acceptance wanes a bit. The issue of trust is always a big part of the equation. In those times, Eden lets those emotions come through and have their moment. It is dangerous to let those feelings bottled up without release.

I asked Eden if she felt that she was just surviving. Her response was that some days she feels she is just going through the motions of coexistence with Debra. Other days, she feels hope that their relationship can weather the storm and come out the other side stronger.

In the end, Eden is simply reacting to what she has been told. For her, she feels that it's up to Debra to get in touch with his repressed feelings, and for him to freely share openly and honestly. Whether that is something that can be done between them or with counseling has yet to be seen.

Eden only wants Debra to acknowledge that she is his life partner. Like with Diane and Eva in our previous story, Eden wants to come first. Not all the time, mind you, just some of the time. There needs to be a balance where each of them gets to be in the spotlight.

Crossdressing can be a very selfish act. For many of us, the focus is on one's self when transforming and perfecting the feminine presentation. But that should not blind us to the needs of our partner. Their world has been turned upside down by learning we are crossdressers. But they stayed anyway. Eden told us that she thinks about Debra when she is shopping, trying to think of something nice to buy either for her husband or for the new girlfriend in her life. The least any of us crossdressers can do is shower our partners with gratitude, affection, and gifts of the love and appreciation we have for them.

YOU CAN QUOTE ME ON THAT

Eden is very articulate and learned. She is empathetic and sincere. And she is very quotable. I had to stop our interview a couple of times so that I could get her words written down just right.

When illustrating how I see a life in balance, Eden and I collaborated that the multiple pans of the scale must have equal value, not equal weight. One pan can be weighed down heavily against the others but as long as the other pans are lighter in weight but heavier in value, the balance is still okay. Remember that a $100 bill is much lighter than a roll of quarters.

When asked if Debra was balanced, he agreed that he was. He had shed and shared the burden of his secret shame, found support and a measure of understanding, and found a newfound sense of self.

For Eden, she is operating in a „work in progress“ mode. She has some good days of acceptance, some ambivalent days of tolerance, and some bad days undercut by a sense of betrayal. Eden seemed surprised when Jen concurred with her that she also goes through days that skirt between acceptance and tolerance. Just because our partners love us, that doesn't necessarily mean that they have the constant fortitude to deal with something that is still a bit foreign to them. Crossdressers, remember to have as much patience and support for your partners as they have for you.

Eden put supporting her husband's identity as Debra in the following words, „Why would someone want to live a more difficult life when they don't need to.“ Sure, why would Debra want to live a life where there is so much prejudice and misunderstanding against him? Society still doesn't accept the notion that crossdressers are *born that way* like they believe for gay and lesbian people and transitioning individuals. In her love for her husband, Eden realizes that Debra needs to live a full life, as he understands it.

On the flip side, Eden also said, „Better to stay with the devil you know.“ Debra is still battling his own demons for accepting Debra as part of his life. He continues to wrestle with an ingrained sense of shame for who he desires to be. Whether having a pantyhose fetish or going out of the house completely *en femme*, Debra is still shy of finding his true balance.

Eden has built a life with her husband, mothering two beautiful daughters, enjoying the new life in her grandchild, and having a home and partnership. She is not looking to jump ship at the notion of this new dynamic with Debra. What she does want is for Debra to be more attentive, more present in their relationship, and to show her a measure of gratitude and caring on the same level as Debra does for her own identity.

Eden and Debra want to have a complete and happy life together. They have built much over the years. They want the new truth to enrich and strengthen their love, not continue to repress the unknown opportunities that could be in store for them. The labor toward happiness shouldn't feel like work, but you do have to put effort in.

1.16. Other Stories – Amanda...

Without a struggle, there can be no progress.

~ Frederick Douglas

All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish, and insensitive to the real values of life. The very striving and hard work that we so constantly try to avoid is the major building block in the person we are today.

~ Pope Paul VI

DISCLAIMER

This is the story of another crossdresser and his wife. In this case, though, the story is told strictly through the eyes of a man named Amanda. His wife is unaware of Amanda. Their two small boys are unaware of Amanda. Only Amanda is aware of Amanda. I wanted to include his story to hopefully illustrate what many gurls go through while holding tight to their secret femininity. While the other couples we have met continue to fight the good fight after the husbands revealed their crossdressing to their wives, Amanda's story serves as a reminder for what it is like to still be struggling with the secret.

WHAT'S THE JOKE?

For Amanda, the first urge to dress came around the age of four. He was fascinated by his cousin's Sunday church-going Mary Janes. He really wanted to try on her shoes, but somehow knew better than to say anything. His second encounter came at Halloween (you know, the crossdressers' Christmas) at the age of five. His mom had dressed him as his favorite childhood character, He-Man. Because of the worry of cold weather, Amanda's mom bought him a pair of tights to wear with the costume. He tried them on as soon as he got home. The weather did not turn cold so Amanda did not get to wear the tights and, eventually, the tights disappeared from his dresser drawer.

Then came third grade and the first of two pranksters at school. One of Amanda's friends dressed up as a girl as a joke. When he saw his friend, Amanda felt funny and tingly and wished that he had been the one to dress up. In the fifth grade, another friend had dressed on a lark. Amanda had lain in bed for months thinking about dressing up in something girly, and curiosity finally got the best of him. He started to try on his mom's and his younger sister's stuff.

This routine went on for a couple of years, whenever he was home alone. As elementary school became middle school, so came the changes that a young boy experiences as he becomes a teenager. Dressing became more frequent as he discovered new feelings that came with the act. Being alone was always a good excuse to wear something pretty.

Amanda thought that by high school's end he had this whole crossdressing fetish beat. But his secret life came at a price as I keep saying (I need a different line!). He really didn't date much throughout high school. He had one girlfriend, but that only lasted for a couple of months. Amanda partially feared she would find out about his crossdressing. The rest was a lack of self-confidence based on the fact that he felt so alien and different. So even well into

his twenties, Amanda was not socially comfortable with other women, having more success and acceptance inside the tendrils of the digital web.

The advent of the Internet, AOL, and his own computer led to new discoveries. The cat of curiosity got the best of him once again, leading to the transgender and crossdressing sites of Geocities. Amanda would lie about his age and make up fantasies abut what he was wearing. He enjoyed the flattery and loved the validation in the chatrooms. He had constructed a virtual avatar before it was a thing, feeling at home and accepted.

Looking back on those wonder years, Amanda considered himself a fairly typical kid. He loved sports, both as a spectator and a participant. He generally liked all the things that boys are supposed to like. In college, he drank and partied (and studied) when he wasn't online. He believes that he was reasonably popular among his peers, but admits that all that time surfing the Internet probably didn't help to develop his confidence, social skills and social life. Those were good years, all in all.

LOVE AT FIRST FLIGHT

Amanda first met Catherine in grade school where they shared classes together. At that age, playing and talking together was always full of innocence. Amanda says he was playfully flirting with her. Catherine admitted to Amanda that she had a crush on him, even back then. As with most things throughout adolescence, Amanda and Catherine only interacted in class or at events that kept them in close proximity. They said hello passing each other in the school hallways.

Fast-forward several years to when the high school reunion was looming. Catherine was on the reunion committee and found Amanda through social media since he had moved away from his hometown for a few years. According to Amanda, Catherine was persistent in keeping their conversations going through Facebook.

Months later, when Amanda came home to visit his family for the holidays, he and Catherine met for drinks with some friends. A few months later, Amanda and Catherine met again a few times and ended up shutting down each restaurant chatting and enjoying each other's company. Next, they spent a romantic weekend at Amanda's apartment. Once they officially started dating, much money was spent on airfare to get together once or twice a month.

It is important to remember why a husband loves his wife so much. I asked Amanda to write down the reasons why. The first reason Amanda cited was that Catherine knew what she wanted out of life and went after it. Amanda admired that in her, having struggled with confidence at times.

Catherine also represented an intellect and a different way of looking at things that Amanda found attractive. They connected on a more cerebral level. He did not get that from the people he surrounded himself with as he grew up. Catherine was worldlier and brought that worldview to him.

Aside from intelligence, Catherine possessed assertiveness and dominance concerning romantic desires and needs. Catherine initiated many of their romantic interludes. Amanda

found it a turn-on, admitting that he wasn't the take-charge type when it came to matters between the sheets. His appreciation of her aggressive nature also stemmed from his fear of being rejected, relieving him from having to voice anything about his own needs and desires.

Catherine epitomized the qualities that Amanda wished he possessed. She was fearless, adventurous, and had no qualms about asking for what she wanted. Amanda first realized he was physically and emotionally attracted to her on their first NYC weekend together. They were down at the Battery in Lower Manhattan on an abnormally cold day, Catherine shivering from being underdressed for the weather. Amanda held her close the whole night to keep her warm.

Then came that first kiss.

First comes love.

Then comes marriage.

Then, yes, you guessed it, comes baby in a baby carriage.

AMANDA BECOMES REAL

For a long time in his teenage years and early twenties, *Amanda* manifested as purely a sexual thing. Even then, there was a lot of denial and shame about what he was doing. These negative feelings retarded any true development of Amanda as a fully realized identity.

He had been on the Internet for years, with the concept of Amanda slowly gaining steam. She continued to lurk in the background, prowling about and not really corresponding with anyone in the real world. It has only really been in the last five years that he accepted the label of crossdresser and allowed Amanda to be expressed in a more meaningful way. But with marital restrictions and responsibilities, Amanda is, for the most part, still mainly expressed via the Internet.

Amanda has accepted his feminine half as part of who he is. He understands that he needs to have an outlet to express *her*. He longs for more quality time for Amanda, although not necessarily anything more permanent. He largely enjoys life as a male, as a husband, and as a provider.

Amanda's one hope is to express his feminine side more often; be more visible. *She* allows him to cast away the everyday stresses and live in the moment, to take a deep breath, and to let loose the femininity that helps to keep him in balance.

BALANCING ACTS

Is Amanda balanced?

At the moment, Amanda would say the answer is no.

Not being able to dress adds a layer of frustration to a life that is wrought with a stressful career and a wife and two boys that deserve his attention. Allowing Amanda time out for an hour or two allows him to get her out of his system for a while.

It's like an addict's fix, in a way. Suppressing those needs to be feminine is like holding back the waves of a tsunami with a $2 umbrella. Setting time aside for dressing allows him to think more clearly and be a better man. He needs to keep in touch with his feminine side in

order to have a better perspective on life and to quell the screaming feminine demands inside his head.

Amanda is quick to point out that his crossdressing is not the only aspect of his life that keeps him off balance. First and foremost, there are his two boys. The children scream for their own attention, both literally and figuratively. They drastically alter the spousal relationship, severely constraining the time and energy for romance and intimacy with his wife.

From two childbirths, to losing an unborn child, to two periods of job upheavals and career uncertainty, relocations, and other more everyday mundane issues, the last four years have included a fill of momentous and traumatic events to keep him off kilter. These facts of life keep some of the important parts of his life on hold, including Amanda.

With the understanding that he does not intend to tell his wife about his crossdressing, Amanda recognizes that he may have dug a waist-deep hole that he will to stand in, indefinitely. Amanda understands that he may never find a perfect balance and that his life will continue on as it is as the status quo.

SUFFERING IN SILENCE

So why does Amanda choose to live a segregated life, continually frustrated and missing out on a part of himself? For Amanda, the answer to that question comes easy – the risk is too great to do otherwise. Why reveal something that he feels will surely lead to him losing everything and everyone he cherishes.

Amanda has gone back and forth on the subject of telling Catherine about his feminine self, but cannot get over the belief and the fear that he will lose her and his boys. He is very analytical, constantly weighing the pros of sharing his full self with his wife versus the cons of losing it all.

He has done his own research on the subject, citing that behavioral psychology says that loss aversion plays a big factor in this case. The concept rings true for him, the endless probabilities swimming around his head in a fast riptide current. Thinking about the factors at play – his wife, his kids, potential fruits of professional success – leads to all of the aspects of his life that he deems more important than the sliver of self that represents his feminine self.

What if others found out? Amanda lives in fear that if other people in his family, his parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, found out about his crossdressing he would be branded with two scarlet letters on his chest – CD. In his mind, fear overwhelms any benefit he could think of about being honest with Catherine, diminishing the possibility that he could be Amanda in a more visible way.

So what is the downside of keeping the secret (besides keeping the secret)? Catherine has only seen her husband do manly things. She sees him watch sports, backpack in the woods, do yard work, and learn more about beer in the hopes of one day making his own brew. She will never truly understand that Amanda act of expressing his feminine side is what truly relaxes him. Since she has never seen ay of the feminine attributes of her husband,

Catherine suggests manly pursuits as distractions and hobbies. This tends to lead to more frustration for him – not relief from it.

Because the social dynamic that Amanda and Catherine share with their neighbors is primarily focused around the wives and children, Amanda is faced with interacting with the other husbands. He finds these interactions forced, as he really has nothing in common with them other than the fact that they are all professionals.

As Amanda, he is more extroverted. He has common interests with other gurls. He can socialize with whom he wants, building relationships more naturally and organically. Plus, since crossdressers typically tend to bare their histories with each other, they do not operate with hidden agenda or expectation. Amanda prefers that sense of freedom when it comes to her friendships.

THE REAL WORLD

Amanda wanted to reinforce that crossdressing (for him) is not real life or even a major component of his real world. His world is comprised of his career, his wife and his kids. Most times, Amanda has no place or position among those facets. As Amanda put it (and I am sure any parent can attest to), kids change everything. Everyone says it, but it cannot be overstated. The time and energy required for them makes one reassess how to approach life. It makes them work harder, smarter and better as a team (if possible).

Amanda and Catherine are working so hard and are so drained that, as a result, romance, intimacy and sex become afterthoughts. At times, Amanda feels like he has less of a wife and more of a really solid work partner and friend. It is something that Amanda knows he and Catherine needs to work on, but those days seem to be relegated to the future where the kids are older, in school fulltime, and a bit less demanding of every life-giving second.

Amanda is also cordoned off to a future where there may be vague opportunities to emerge from his feminine cocoon. He claims that Catherine may not accept Amanda as part of their lives, but also states that she is very liberal and accepting of alternative social choices. She lets transsexuals and drag queens live and let live. She can understand these concepts. But there have been theoretical conversations about crossdressers that continue to give Amanda pause. Catherine has joked with friends and with Amanda that she just doesn't get why a *normal* man would want to wear a dress.

RISK VERSUS REWARD

I asked Amanda what advice she has to offer to other crossdressers who are wrestling with revealing themselves to their partner. His answer was, „What advice can *they* offer me?" As with everything in life, opinions are like butt holes... everyone has one and they tend to stink. As Amanda tells it, every time he has a conversation with another crossdresser that swings around to this topic, the answer is typically; „You should tell her so you can be yourself." Amanda's answer is, „What if I'm risking huge parts of myself by telling her?"

For Amanda, she says that she would advise people to weigh the risks versus rewards – analyze the upside versus the downside – of sharing their crossdressing with their significant other. The upsides could include the relief of being completely honest with their partner,

possibly more time being feminine, and maybe (just maybe) a partner who actively encourages and participates with them. The downsides are the loss of family, friends, children, professional status, and their standing in the community. They are risking the exposure of an irreversible *known*, understanding that their relationship will not be the same afterward.

Amanda advises that crossdressers need to look for clues from their spouses or partners as to how they would react to the knowledge, cautioning that even if the crossdresser is fairly certain of his partner's social position on the subject one never can predict the actual outcome. The most socially liberal and accepting person on the planet will not appreciate that their crossdressing partner has kept such an important part of them secret and hidden. The reveal of a crossdressing nature is a bombshell. But it will actually pale in comparison to the feelings of betrayal and trust that the partner will have.

HOPE ISN'T A STRATEGY

What kind of relationship does Amanda want between him and Catherine? He wants an open, accepting, and nurturing relationship. He wants them to bring out the best in one another, keep the romantic and intimate flames crackling, be each other' best friend, and allow for individual downtime to recharge.

Amanda is aware, that because of his crossdressing secret, he has chosen to inhibit many of the things he just outlined above. His fear of rejection and losing everything he holds dear stay his lips from sharing his secret. He is not willing to take the risk after having gone this far down this road.

He would love for Catherine and him to accidentally fall into the art of crossdressing. Amanda is looking for a narrative that would unravel like a fairytale where Catherine discovered that she loved it when her husband wore her panties and dresses. But as Amanda said, „... that's hope, and hope is not a strategy."

REGRETS, I'VE HAD A FEW

Amanda says that he has two major regrets in his life. The first is his assumption that he needs to live up to other people's expectations; to be what others expect him to be. The second is not telling Catherine the whole truth about himself early on in the relationship.

By his mid-twenties, Amanda was getting pressured by his traditional-minded family to get a wife, settle down, and have kids. Even with that familial coaxing, Amanda didn't have the heart to pursue a relationship. Finally, it was Catherine who pursued him. It was Catherine who made him realized that he was loved and worthwhile.

Amanda was adamantly against telling Catherine about his crossdressing. Why ruin a good thing? Plus, Amanda hadn't even understood that crossdressing was an integral part of him. He was in the early stages of acceptance at that point, just starting to think about getting a makeover and getting *her* out there.

If the time table had been moved forwards a year, the dynamic may have been different with telling Catherine. Amanda may have had more confidence in himself and with his female persona. He may have had less fear about revealing himself to the woman he loved. But at the time that they started dating, Amanda just wasn't there yet.

Amanda should have known better than to believe that his crossdressing was a phase or that those feelings would just go away, but he just pushed it to the back of his mind with the thought that he would deal with it later. That was a big mistake, because later is now, and he still hasn't dealt with his crossdressing as far as how it impacts their relationship.

The internal struggle and wrestling with the what-ifs of sharing the secret doesn't get any easier. Amanda is not sure that it ever will, but after a lot of thought and analysis, he has concluded that it is the best course of action (or non-action) for him – for now.

1.17. The New Gurl

Happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you sit down quietly, may alight upon you.

~ Nathaniel Hawthorne

There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be butterfly.

~ R. Buckminster Fuller

BECOMING

Nathaniel Hawthorne's quote of butterflies has nice similarities to many facets of the crossdressing life. From the obvious analogy of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon to striving to become something just beyond our grasp, all touch on the spirit of who and what we are.

Either as a youth or as an adult, all crossdressers have to come to terms with who they are. We can deny and fear our feminine emergence from the darkness of our minds for as long we deem fit but eventually we will have to stretch our wings and become. Otherwise, we face the risk of atrophy in some way – either in our relationship, our own balance, or in life.

I believe the more important point of the quote is that of the pursuit of the butterfly. You can't chase it. You have to have patience. Many crossdressers have lived with the slow development of their feminine personas over a period of years. We lifers have slowly become the *New Girl*, continuing to develop and perfect our personas as we go.

The late bloomers can have a different story. They have had to jumpstart their development over a period of months. Whether because of trauma, denial, or other emotional or environmental factors, many dressers don't find themselves facing a feminine mirror until later in their life. Their journey of self-discovery takes on a decidedly truncated development. There is urgency to it. There is a rush of regret for an undiscovered youth and for lost crossdressing opportunities. Now they are the New Girls.

THE PINK FOG

While I am fairly certain that Jimmy Hendrix was very familiar with purple haze, I doubt he was versed in one of the pink variety. That may not be true, though, because my recent research has uncovered a Pink Haze strain of marijuana. But the pink haze I am referring to has a different meaning than *being so infatuated with someone that you can't think straight*. For the crossdresser, he is infatuated with someone, all right – *herself*! Hence, the pink fog (pink haze is for normal people infatuations) may have descended.

When the pink fog rolls in, it is a blinding and emotionally charged mist that encompasses a crossdresser's entire reason for being. Like having an addiction, the crossdresser in the pink fog can't get enough of their feminine forms, the charged excitement, and the untried adventures. Loved ones' feelings take a back seat to the crossdresser's desires. Every new adventure raises the bar of normalcy for the crossdresser while it scares the shit out of his partner.

How much is too much?

How fast is too fast?

How far is too far?

Each man's discovery of his femininity is different. Each relationship with their partner is unique. Each descent into the pink fog results in any measure of duration and degree of influence. Regardless, the most important takeaway is remembering its influence.

What do you mean?

Keep in mind how the experience affected you, and realize how it affected others. Remember, dear crossdresser, who you are. Don't lose those excellent qualities you possess in favor of paper-thin emotional highs. Don't forget that there is a woman (and possibly other family and children) who is struggling with this New Girl. You are not the only person in your own life (unless you are single and have zero attachments and commitments). You need to understand that everything you are reveling in and excited about is, mostly likely, unfamiliar to your significant other and holds nothing but trepidation.

Heck, I know that it's difficult to pass by every wig or pair of heels you see in the mall windows or online store. I have fallen prey to those urges, too. But with a limited budget, I don't have the luxury to buy whatever I want for Savannah. I get lucky with getting hand-me-downs from my girlfriend and finding great finds at garage sales. Some things can't be obtained through the cheap and thrifty methods, but that doesn't mean that you can't wear the same outfit in your closet more than once.

I'M ON TOP OF THE WORLD, MA!

That is not what James Cagney is quoted as saying in *White Heat*. The actual quote is „Made it, Ma! Top of the world!". And so illustrates our memory and understanding of what is real and what is perceived. The point is that we can't always rely on memory when thinking that we have it all figured out. The moment you stop learning is the moment you stop living, said Tetsuyama-san.

So what are you talking about, Savannah?

Referring back to the Pink Fog, we crossdressers are not always in our right minds. Of course, that could be said about us in general terms, but please understand that a sudden rush of elation to the head after being given the green light to explore our femininity (typically within the relationship) is like skydiving for the first time.

The first time I crossed skydiving off my bucket list came with it several minutes of fear and questioning about whether this was the right idea (fear of talking about our crossdressing to our partner), followed by a sense of calm (the relief of sharing the secret), then more nervousness and fear for jumping out of a perfectly mechanically sound airplane (going out for the first time *en femme*), and finally taking the plunge and going into sensory overload.

Feminine sensory overload is the culprit that can stall your crossdressing acceptance by your partner. When you are freefalling, you feel like you are floating. I was so overwhelmed by my skydive and so focused on the other skydiver taking pictures and video of me that I completely missed out on the fact that I could have been taking in the curvature of the earth and witnessing the entirety of Long Island from 12,000 feet. Freedom to explore our

crossdressing can possibly lead to such a ferocious single-mindedness of our femme selves that we fail to recognize the internal struggles of those around us. We may forget that they struggling with the idea that they are losing one of the best parts of themselves to a mistress – to this New Girl.

1.18. Masculinity vs Femininity

I definitely feel closer to the feminine side of the human being that I do the male – or the American idea of what a man is supposed to be. Just watch a beer commercial and you'll see what I mean.

~ Kurt Cobain

Masculinity is not something given to you, but something you gain. And you gain it by winning small battles with honor.

~ Norman Mailer

MEDIUM

I heard a funny analogy that I thought would apply here. I told my co-workers that I paid for a psychic entertainment dinner package for Jen's birthday. And, yes, it was entertaining. One of my co-workers mentioned that there was a fundamental difference between magicians and psychics. Magicians are master of illusion while psychics and mediums claim to see the future and commune with the dead. Magicians are accepted without skepticism while most treat psychics with cynicism. There is a notion of implied trickery versus implied realism.

Can the same be true about crossdressers?

Do people see us and assume we are trying to trick people into believing we are women? Knowing that many of us will be „clocked" as men while out dressed as our feminine selves, is that really a concern? I have heard stories where men at bars will be frustrated and angry when finding out that they were attracted to a woman who ended up having ‚a little something extra'.

They feel cheated and deceived, that they were baited into their attraction to the crossdresser, uncertain as to why they were caught in the allure to that fake woman sipping an apple martini at the bar. That uncertainty may lead to strange feelings that those men will not understand how to process.

And like men do, they will probably lash out in some way.

Typical men!

But is it typical?

GENDER STEREOTYPES

We have been conditioned from birth (practically) to accept men and women as having certain traits. Boys are designated as blue (sometimes yellow) and girls are designated as pink. I mean, how would we be able to know the sex of the baby at the gender reveal party if we didn't know what color to use?

I understand that, in general, men have more muscle mass and women are more maternal, and...um... I actually had to go to the vast and deep knowledge of the Internet to recall the actual stereotypes (since I ain't one). According to PlannedParenthood.org, there are four basic kinds of gender stereotypes; personality traits, domestic behaviors, occupations, and physical appearance.

The first, personality traits, relegates woman to the more passive and submissive roles, while men are expected to be more self-confident and aggressive. Men are hunter... women are gatherers. Men club women on their heads and drag them by the hair back to their caves.

The second trait, domestic behaviors, revolves around the dynamic of the division of labor within a nuclear relationship. Women are maternal (see, I remembered one!), best suited for the caring and raising of the children. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be able to fix a pipe and mow the lawn. How long will a wife or girlfriend fume at the overflowing kitchen garbage because it is the man's job to tie up the bag and take it to the can outside? How often will men wait for their spouses to prepare dinner for them?

When it comes to occupations, the third stereotype of the gender split still persists. It reminds me of the following riddle:

A father and son are in a horrible car crash that kills the dad. The son is rushed to the hospital; just as he's about to go under the knife, the surgeon says, „I can't operate – that boy is my son!"

Explain.

Did you get the right answer?
Did it take you a minute?
Give up?

The person couldn't operate on the boy because it was the boy's mother. Wait! What? The doctor was a female surgeon? Preposterous!

That is a standard of occupational stereotyping that we have had engrained in us from an early age. It is based on classifying woman as second-class citizens with the assumption that women lacked the intelligence to pursue male-dominated careers. We couldn't fathom that women just weren't afforded the opportunity to get the education necessary for those jobs. Instead, we just thought they were being dumb ole girls. And then the opposite is still kind of true. Men in female-dominated roles – secretaries, executive assistants, nurses – are considered to be less than and made as the butt of jokes about doing a woman's job. Luckily, that dynamic is slowly changing.

The last, and probably the most apropos to our discussions, is physical appearance. Men are expected to be broad-shouldered, tall, and muscular. Women are expected to be graceful and small, slight of frame, and demure. If you sit in a Starbucks for any period of time and people watch (like I do while I am writing), you will see a myriad of people in all shapes, sizes, and colors. But we still cling to popularized and standardized notions of what women and men should be and how they should conduct themselves.

Words commonly used to describe femininity are:

dependent
emotional

passive
sensitive
quiet
graceful
innocent
weak
flirtatious
nurturing
self-critical
soft
sexually submissive
accepting

Words commonly used to describe masculinity are:

independent
non-emotional
aggressive
tough-skinned
competitive
clumsy
experienced
strong
active
self-confident
hard
sexually aggressive
rebellious

These traits are very back-and-white. There is no flexibility to allow or accept masculinity within the feminine list, and visa versa. All men and women – all humans – are an amalgam of both lists, with some traits more dominant in their lives than others.

The hope is to accept people for who they are regardless of the mix of the recipe. Maybe if we were more open-minded about others, they would not feel the need to suppress their identities. And this belief carries way beyond the spectrum of crossdressers.

GENDER BEGINNINGS

There is a feeling of condemnation that some people experience when a crossdressing partner reveals his femininity. The crossdresser has now destroyed the gender lines in the relationship. The biological boundary, once an established and stable *constant*, is forever altered.

Thanks, crossdressing partner, the spouse says with pointed sarcasm.

All of a sudden, the revelation explains so much as to why her man is the way he is! Everything makes perfect sense now as to why he was sometimes withdrawn and depressed. Now the spouse realizes why her man is so interested in her fashion and is able to provide that rare insight for what looks best on her and why he crosses his legs the way he does, or why he is so touchy-feely.

Why can't men cry when they watch *The Green Mile*? That scene at the warden's house is heartbreaking. So is the scene when John Coffey shakes Paul Edgecomb's hand before riding the lightning... sniff. Why are men expected to express their feelings differently than women? Have we been so conditioned in our gender roles that the mere notion of impropriety of our specific and defined gender will condemn us in the eyes of others?

We are conditioned.

From birth we are shown what it means to be a boy or a girl. Many younger couples are employing a more relaxed parenting concept, nurturing their children with more encouragement than with defined structure and restrictions. When I grew up, parents still adhered to the traditional gender norms. I would have been petrified if my dad found out that I liked to dress in frilly and satiny clothes. I knew inherently that what I was doing would not be accepted. I had been conditioned with what appropriate gender roles were for girls and for boys, the gender lines established in my brain by the family dynamic, my socialization with other kids, and what I saw on television. Hey, I loved Sesame Street, but don't ever remember seeing any of those boy Muppets wearing pink.

I loved Grover and Cookie Monster.

That being said, did you know that Sesame Street has recently introduced its own relevant segment about gender expression called the Dress-Up Me Club? In the segments, Abby Cadabby plays with her pals, Prairie Dawn and Elmo, and decides they will all be superheroes or princesses. Abby is told that superhero-ing is for boys and playing princess is for girls. These lovable furry monsters soon discover that it doesn't matter whether you are a boy or girl to express who you want to be.

In the last couple years retailers like Toys R Us and Target have begun to phase out the labeling of their toys being geared toward „boys" or „girls". Thanks to input by parents and progressives, marketing had been remodeled to focus on the encouragement of the child's creativity and development, not the one-dimensional gender baseline of aggressive masculine behavior for boys and domestic service for girls. It is a positive shift in thinking, but it is just a start since those mixed toy aisles are still filled with pink Barbie and Littlest Pet Shop packaging versus techy sci-fi LEGO or NERF boxes (although NERF has come out with their girl-demographic Rebelle line of foam dart weapons).

IT BEGINS WITH THE TRUTH

It's great that boys and girl are starting to be deprogrammed from the traditional gender roles. Spectacular! But what about all the thirty-something and above men and women who have already been conditioned with what they understand gender to be? For them (and I

mean me, too), it will always be an uphill battle to win over hearts and minds about how us crossdressers are actually a normally occurring phenomenon.

As I had mentioned earlier, I knew well enough to hide my crossdressing from my mother's disapproval and my father's wrath. That fear served to lock me into a veneer of an accepted masculine role in order to conform. It has taken years to deprogram myself as to what is the truth for me. We all have a desire to be true to ourselves (as far as we understand the truth to be). Social norms have and will influence how far we deny our authentic self. Why explore something within ourselves that is considered abhorrent and subject to scorn and ridicule?

No human enjoys rejection.

None of us want to fear for our safeties.

All of us strive to be loved and accepted.

So many of us *go along to get along*, taking on the mantles of exaggerated masculinity in order to be accepted. Play sports in high school, pursue girls like all hormone-crazed boys do, get a manly job, act tough and debase others to elevate ourselves... you know, all of those typical things people do. These concepts serve to mentally castrate the crossdressing man (ouch) from his innate feminine feelings.

In fact, all men have what would be defined as feminine feelings, not just crossdressing and homosexual ones. Women have masculine feelings. We only label them because we all need labels for things. Yes, stereotypes have their roots in truth, but stereotypes are the simplest form of a definition of any group. Asians are all smart. Caucasians are all privileged. African Americans are all thugs. Crossdressers are all sex-crazed perverts. We perpetuate the myths based on a vague understanding of the group as a whole. Worse, we cling to those generalities in our ignorance, validating every experience where it reinforces our existing bias and ignoring all other proof that runs contrary to our existing beliefs.

CROSSDRESSERS ARE DUMB

Conversely (not the shoe, but an important sounding word), crossdressers are guilty of using pre-defined female stereotypes to define our own feminine identities. And, not only that, we can exaggerate the female form to such a degree in our pursuit of our presentation of womanhood that we fail to realize that we are close to becoming a parody of that which we hold in the highest regard. It's a crazy rollercoaster loopty-loop of double standards.

Women can wear pants, but men can't wear skirts. Women can be masculine and assertive for their careers, but men are teased for having feelings (although women are still considered to be the B-Word sometimes if too assertive, unfortunately). Women are applauded for being more like men. Men are ridiculed or labeled as gay if they seem more effeminate.

Sigh.

A crossdresser's feminine pursuit can put him on a collision course of epitomizing an outdated cookie-cutter version of what he believes the perfect woman to be. I have met

several gurls who love the now trendy retro look, happy to take on a 1950s pearl-adorned housewife persona.

Is that what they think a woman is?

Isn't that more of a masquerade than an expression?

Who am I to judge what their gender expression is?

I am also guilty of taking my feminine expression to a level beyond where some cis-women do (even on their best dress up days). I prefer heels that are 3 inches or higher. I love form-fitting dresses and outfits that can accentuate my fake curves, even if going to a casual restaurant. I love heavier smoky eye makeup and thick lashes. Oh, and I must have French manicure press-on nails.

Do I over-sexualize the female form?

Probably.

Most women will cast away those high heels under the reception hall table in favor of uncrushed toes and distressed arches. We crossdressers will keep those heels on all night. We wear corsets tight enough to leave indentations in our torsos at the end of the night. We suffer for our craft. We endure the pain and discomfort for the illusion of our expression. Anything less and we will feel incomplete.

My girlfriend has been great with giving me constructive criticism and offering me her now too-big clothes. She has a spirited, gypsy style and I have been happy to add these items into my wardrobe. What we constantly disagree on is the tightness and length of the hemline of my skirts. Can't agree on everything, I guess. And I can't make the general populace suffer by covering up my best assets – my legs!

Some crossdressers need to re-evaluate their feminine expression to be more modern and trendy if they wish to become *one of the girls*. If the goal is to blend in, there are fashion trends and parameters that are in place in certain locales that are acceptable. Keeping to these guidelines will allow you to ghost through a restaurant without turning heads (in a negative appraising way). Five inch heeled thigh high boots may not be the best choice for a run to Starbucks.

As the knight guarding the Holy Grail in the cave said in the final act of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, choose wisely.

TRUE TO FORM

An important thing to keep in mind is the idea that you have to be balanced and be true to who you are. We all have both a masculine and feminine side. The only reason why the two halves are separated is because we have been taught that they are to be separated. Corralling appropriate gender behavior has been based on a system of social restrictions set in place long before we stepped into it.

For me, I have always known that I saw the world a bit differently than the other boys around me. I wasn't good at sports, although I tried to fit in on the varsity squad. I didn't care for the roughhousing and stupidity that other boys immersed themselves in throughout their adolescence. I had more female friends than those of my own gender. I focused on school,

and eventually, girlfriends, then college and life beyond that. I thought I was an old soul because I wasn't into all of the hi-jinks that I witnessed around me.

So I tried to be more like everyone else. I don't think I really went out of my way on a conscious level, though. I mean, I liked playing on the high school football team, although I didn't appreciate the testosterone-fueled aggressiveness off the field. Boys are dumb that way. I was more of a bookworm, a nerd, a geek... you know, all those other labels we have thrust upon us.

I believe that my lack of machismo allowed me to be more in balance with who I truly am. And that is the natural byproduct of the most important quality we can bring to ourselves and to others.

Honesty.

We have to be true to ourselves. As crossdressers, it is of the utmost importance to explore all we can about who we could possibly be. There isn't a crossdressing manual to refer to, except the vast cross-functional reading that is available on the Internet. Let me remind you that I'm talking about much more than erotic fiction and webcam sites.

Be thoughtful.

Be mindful.

Be reflective.

Only through the rigors of a thorough self-examination will you discover what you have been suppressing. I'm not talking about the Pink Fog that so many crossdressers will blast through in an effort to make up for lost time, but looking into your soul to discover what is hidden there. Armed with the maps and journals of that exploration will allow you to more easily open a dialogue with your partner.

There will be hard questions asked of you. They are important questions that need to be discussed, with no hesitation or worries about what the answer may be. If you don't know the answers or are afraid of the answers, dear crossdressers, do not get defensive or adamant about your position on the subject. Allow the conversation to unravel as you both travel this road together.

HALF COCKED OR FULL BORE

I know the things I'm saying sound daunting.

They are daunting. But they are not insurmountable or herculean tasks. Revealing yourself to your partner is not the only step you need to take together. It is the first utterance in a lifetime of discussions, turmoil, tears, and joy as you navigate these waters together.

Crossdressers, you need to understand who you truly are and what your needs are. Your partners deserve nothing less. Dear partners, you need to ask questions, read books, and find others in the same position. In the meanwhile, try not to judge your crossdressing man too harshly based on what you *think* a crossdresser represents.

Crossdressers, try to stay away from the Pink Fog. Just because you have talked to your partner about who you are, you need to step with caution as you move forward. Just because

your partner has not thrown you out of the house doesn't mean that every day is a feminine Mardi Gras.

Be sure, dear crossdressers, to appreciate your partner. Show her gratitude for sticking with you and wanting to better understand you. Show her that you are still masculine in the ways that she fell in love with. Yeah, that could be an innuendo if you want to think that way. Remember that your spouse was attracted to a man. And, dear partner, remember you fell in love with someone with intangible qualities that set him apart from the other men you had previously associated with. Perhaps now they make better sense to you.

Somewhere in the above paragraph is the balance. Crossdressers need to be true to each side of their gender identity, keeping in mind that the person that loves them the most is not ready to forego the man they love for the woman you want them to love.

But I'm the same person either way.

That may be true, dear crossdresser, but you are still presenting as someone that your partner is not familiar with.

Make love to a woman... wait, now I'm a lesbian?

Hold hands with a stranger... hey, I don't know you, lady!

You're the same man underneath... that's not what those stockings and corset say to me!

Prove to your spouse that you are the same person regardless of your gender expression.

Are you less kind as a woman? Why?

Are you more flirtatious? How come?

Are you attracted to men when you dress as a woman? Is that because you want to have sex with them or because you love the attention?

These are basic questions that crossdressers need to ask themselves, and partners have every right to ask. Understanding why we do things when we are dressed shouldn't be a mystery to us. If they are, then that mystery will become something that your partner will be desperate to solve, even if she needs to make a number of assumptions based on her own level of knowledge and experience to do so.

WHAT'S THAT EXPRESSION?

The non-fetish, non-transitioning crossdresser doesn't want to be locked into one gender expression. For one, I love being a genetic man as much as I love dressing to the nines as Savannah. I don't mind a bit of scruff (until it gets itchy). I also don't mind a tight bodycon scuba dress (on me or my girlfriend).

I don't dress to attract men, although I admit it's flattering when they want to buy me a drink. It's a cliché but it's a validation of the gender expression I'm exhibiting at that moment. Savannah would be just as flattered if a woman did the same.

We all want to be appreciated and loved. These social conventions serve to support the notion that we are attractive, desirable, and accepted. A typical crossdresser does not dress to go on the prowl for a man, nor do they dress as a woman to mock her femininity.

Crossdressers find relief from the typical masculine via donning feminine attire and applying makeup. This allows them to express themselves in a manner that is typically reserved for the female of our species.

I remember going into The Village in NYC on Halloween dressed as my favorite female Marvel superhero. A man came up to me and asked me for a light for his cigarette. If you saw me, you would know there was no place on my person to hide any flammable materials. Below is the exchange, verbatim:

„Do you have a light?“

„Sorry, “ I said in my male voice. „I don’t smoke.“

„Oh, shit. You’re a dude!“ he replied and drifted away.

I was flattered that this young drunk man didn’t clock me as a man until I spoke. I felt good about myself and how I was able to pass casual inspection presenting as a woman. I felt sexy and desirable. Later on that night, several young female Asian tourists stopped me to take a smart phone group picture. They made me feel just as good as the guy had earlier. I was happy that I could be a good memory of their Halloween night in New York City.

Do you want to be perceived as a woman?

I have to say I don’t know. I would love to be passable as a woman when I decide to do so. I have no problem using the men’s room in a restaurant if dressed as a woman, because that is how I regard myself (a man, in general). I do struggle with wanting to perfect my feminine appearance and wish that some of the curves and tone were naturally more female at those times so I could shed the use of padding and wear more revealing outfits.

There is an inherent convention that gender dictates sexuality. Men are attracted to women, and women are attracted to men. That is the normal species default but it’s not an absolute. Many alternative sexual lifestyles are at play throughout society and the world. Regardless of who you are attracted to, someone in that form will be appealing to you. Therefore, it is assumptive to think that if you are presenting as that gender you must be attracted to the opposite gender. It’s funny that, as I wrote that last sentence, I was tempted to write „...must be attracted to the opposite sex...“

We do need to be more mindful that gender expression is not equal to our sexual orientation. Most crossdressers would like to experience their female sides with their girlfriends or wives. That way they would feel that their partners loved them as a whole person, even if the expression is halved.

BODY IMAGE

I’m going to soapbox for a moment.

Fair warning!

Dear partners, please realize that we crossdressers put so much effort into our female presentation because 1) we have to in order to simulate anything close to femininity, 2) we want our appearance to be flawless, 3) we don’t want to be „clocked“ by other men and women, and 4) we are doing our damnedest to emulate the female ideal that we have set on the highest pedestal.

In our interviews, we have come across women who have become part of their crossdresser partner's journey. More often than not, the cis-woman is intimidated by the effort that their crossdressing mate puts into his process to get ready. The woman may suffer from self-esteem issues as a result of the fact that they don't put on heels and foundation every time they decide to leave the house to go to the grocery store for milk, bread and eggs.

Have they become complacent?

Have they lost a bit of the luster from their own sensuality and femininity?

For me, I envy women for being women. They have all of the assets that they need. We crossdressers have to put hours in while our girlfriends or wives can put in practiced minutes to get ready to go out on the town. I am always an advocate that we should strive to be the best we can be, physically and mentally. Each of us, men and women, should celebrate our body and the effort we put into it. We are all beautiful creatures. Sometimes we just have to be reminded of that fact.

PASSING THOUGHTS

Crossdressing is typically not a passing fancy. It may be something that men fight against and suppress throughout their lives. We may try, time after time, to purge the urge out of our systems, only to find that the desire comes back to haunt us. Living in denial was only good for Queen Cleopatra.

Once we understand that our personal expression of crossdressing is not a fetish or a phase, the next step is to understand and fully accept ourselves. That will allow others to accept us – through the confidence we exude, education, enlightenment, and being a beacon of truth and a positive example for others to find and follow.

We try so hard to emulate and blend in as women that sometimes we forget that passability is not the same as acceptance. Hell, tolerance is not the same as acceptance! Being mistaken for a woman at first glance is not the same as being accepted as a crossdresser. My writing of this book is my attempt to go beyond my abilities to pass as a woman and get into the unknown territories of acceptance of which we are – crossdressers.

1.19. Have You Heard That Joke?

My mission in life is not merely to survive but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.

~ Maya Angelou

Everything is funny, as long as it's happening to somebody else.

~ Will Rogers

TRUTH IN LIFE

I have a wonderful friend named Lisa who adores the fact that I have an alternative gender identity. When I first told her, she was excited and interested, and best of all, totally accepting. Jen and I met Lisa and her fiancé for coffee and dessert at a local coffee shop. Lisa gushed about how awesome it was to have me as a friend, adamant with her love and support of me.

After we said our goodbyes and made our way to our car, Jen made the point that it's easier for Lisa to be objective when she doesn't have to live with a crossdresser. Jen, in those days, was still a bit shell-shocked as she tried to find her bearings on handling what was happening between the three of us (counting Savannah).

Jen is right, though. While Lisa had been exposed to folks with different sexual orientations and gender identities, Jen had never been close to such people and grew up with a more traditional gender perspective of men and women.

Additionally, before I revealed Savannah, Jen had admitted that an early boyfriend had surprised her by dressing in lingerie. The reveal was quick, awkward and embarrassing. Jen mentioned that she may have cursed with surprise and left the house, hoping normalcy would resume upon her return.

TWO CROSSDRESSERS WALK INTO A BAR

Let's take a break from all of the information and stories you are consuming and committing to memory with perfect clarity, accuracy, and understanding. I offer you a silly, and somewhat true, list of reasons why it's better to be in a loving relationship with a crossdresser.

I know that many (if not most) women want their mates to be burly, macho and manly. It goes without saying since the majority of pairings between a man and a woman follow these conventions. But I am here to break the stranglehold of these social constructs, not because they are wrong, but because there is room for other definitions of what makes a relationship functional and successful.

This list is for the women who love their men just the way they are. They love both the amalgam of the masculinity and the femininity that their partners possess. Women, do your men dote on you and consider you a porcelain sculpture deserving of nothing less than a pedestal? Are they loving and understanding in a way that is a bit different than your other previous boyfriends (or... gasp... husbands)? If you loved the totality of your men's personality prior to you finding out that they loved to wear feminine clothes, this Top 35 list is for you!

The List

1. Your crossdresser is more in tune with the female mind. Men generally try to *fix things*. Your partner will be more apt to talk out issues and won't devalue your feelings.
2. Your crossdresser will be more apt to like chick flicks, and won't be embarrassed to be seen at the theater with you.
3. Your crossdresser is more emotional, cries easily at the movies, and melts over puppies and kittens.
4. Your crossdresser is happy to take you out on the dance floor, regardless of how good they think they can dance.
5. Your crossdresser is fiercely loyal to you, and recognizes how wonderful you are.
6. Your crossdresser can keep a secret. They have had plenty of practice.
7. Your crossdresser is open to the idea of consulting a therapist to better your relationship – and him.
8. You have a valuable fashion consultant who knows what you look best in. Gone are the days of hearing your man say, „It looks fine".
9. If you are close to the same sizes, you have now effectively doubled your wardrobe. Plus, you can experiment with a style that may not necessarily be what you think will work.
10. Your crossdresser will always be envious of what you are wearing, knowing that if you both wore the same outfit you will always Wear It Best!
11. Your crossdresser will always be up for a day of clothes shopping with you (see #8 above, again!).
12. You have a girlfriend as well as a boyfriend. Your crossdresser will be your closest and most intimate friend in all ways, if you want him to be.
13. Want to change your own look? Just grab an outfit out of your crossdresser's closet and a wig off the stand and be whoever you want to be.
14. Your crossdresser will be forever grateful that you take an interest in how he should appropriately apply makeup. And he can show you tips you weren't ever aware of. Thank you, YouTube tutorials!
15. Your crossdresser will be sympathetic about how you feel about your hairy legs.
16. Your crossdresser will never be irritated that you need another 15 minutes to get ready for an engagement. He knows what effort it takes to feel beautiful and presentable.
17. Don't have a body briefer? Put a run in your last pair of pantyhose? No problem. Your crossdresser has got you covered.
18. Your crossdresser appreciates your body, style and mind.
19. If you buy something for the home, your crossdresser will never have an issue with it being too girly.
20. The toilet seat will always be down. No more midnight ass splashdowns!

21. Your crossdresser understands and empathizes with how you might feel about your body. He has battled a poor body image for years!
22. Your crossdresser will join you at the nail or beauty salon with no complaints.
23. Your crossdresser knows how to do the laundry – the right way!
24. Your crossdresser has walked a mile in your shoes – literally.
25. Your crossdresser treats a lady like a lady should be treated.
26. Your crossdresser loves to engage in deeper, longer... you guessed it... conversation.
27. Remember what you were thinking for #26? Your crossdresser loves that, too.
28. Your crossdresser would love to experiment in the bedroom with whatever you come up with. Plus, you get a girlfriend, if that is something of interest.
29. Your crossdresser is always attentive to making sure you look your best.
30. Your crossdresser's gurlfriends will all love you. Do you know why? Because you are awesome!
31. Your crossdresser loves to snuggle more than you do.
32. Your crossdresser puts your needs first.
33. Don't have the right shade of makeup or lipstick? Odds are your crossdresser does!
34. Your crossdresser loves to show you affection at any time, regardless of how they are dressed.
35. Even though your crossdresser knows how to keep a secret, they are genuine with their critiques (food, fashion, style, etc.). They want to know what works and what don't work, and will do the same for you.

BONUS

1. No macho bullshit. You get all the feminine qualities without the competitiveness and cattiness that sometimes comes along with it.

1.20. From Closet To Coatrack

Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place.

~ Zora Neale Hurston

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

~ Henry David Thoreau

LIVING IN DARKNESS

Many crossdressers have lived in darkness and with secrecy for much of their lives. As lifetime dressers, they were faced with the inherent knowledge that what they did wasn't acceptable. Personally, I never felt shame for the act of dressing. However, I did have shame for trespassing where I wasn't supposed to be and for the thought that others would shun me for who I was. The inferences from television and the comments from those closest to me trained me to believe that I was something unnatural and uncommon. It wasn't until a move to NYC and the growing popularity of the Internet did I realize that I wasn't just a feminine fetish freak. Others, those late bloomers, may have lived with deep-rooted denials of who they were, having suppressed a vague notion based on a misunderstanding and fear of their attraction to female attire.

Whatever the reasons, crossdressers have lived in the shadows of one fear or another. Now, you are faced with a brand new social circumstance where you must understand how to dig out from that pit to emerge into the world. The first step, the most shocking and painful step on both sides, is dealing with the telling. Imagine a man who holds a secret so long that they can't fathom how to utter the words and can't rationalize a positive outcome. Some secrets are best kept secrets, in our skewed opinion. Better to perpetuate it, stacking fibs, white lies, and bald-faced deceit to the mix until the web we have created is too sticky and tight to escape.

KEEP IT IN CONTEXT

Sir Walter Scott wrote*, Oh! What a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive*. In the Bible, John 8:32 reads as, *And ye shall know truth, and the truth shall make you free.* One references a love triangle in a play and the other teaches about an understanding of a higher power. What both represent to me in this context is that telling truth is easier than lies. Honesty is better than deceit. I am not advocating an admission in all cases or with all partners. That is a decision that only you can make for yourself. But if you are reading this book, dear reader, you may have already been exposed to the scary truth of speaking it or hearing it, or on the cusp of sharing your authentic self.

Where do we go from here? Can we adapt? Can we accept each other in this new dynamic? There are so many questions with so many answers. And, all that I can guarantee is

that none of the answers will come easy. The answers will lead to more questions... and more answers... and on and on.

But let's assume, dear partner, that you have taken the first steps. Let's assume that by reading this book you are open to expanding your understanding of what makes your crossdressing partner tick. You may find your situation uncertain and scary, but you are obviously taking a good step by reading my effort. I am sure you are also devouring other books, articles, and blogs that offer a measure of enlightenment. As we have discussed, though, knowledge comes with its own challenges.

CONVERSATIONS, NOT CONFRONTATIONS

Take a few minutes, a few days, or longer to get composed, armed with your new knowledge. Take a series of deep breaths and sit down with your crossdressing partner with your questions.

Beloved partners, set ground rules if you feel that your crossdresser may be overly sensitive, tense or averse to questioning. Re-affirm that you love him and remind him that this is a safe space to discuss whatever has come to mind from the reading. Remember that your crossdressing partner is in just as raw an emotional state as you. His fears of rejection and of your judgment abound. Be objective in your questions, mindful of his responses, and caring in your follow-ups.

Crossdressers, remember that questions asked are not a direct attack on you, just an attempt to understand where your crossdressing fits into the fabric of the gender spectrum and your relationship. Understand that your partner has little practical experience with anyone with your gender identity, while you have had plenty of time to come to terms with it.

Be patient and honest. You may find that the questions you answer will give you an even higher enlightenment of yourself, too. Listen to your partner... hear her words. Do not tack on your own fears and assumptions to her queries.

Also remember that this is not a sprint, but a marathon. The same questions may be re-asked over several sit-downs (you know, like the mafia). Understanding does not come with one response. It also doesn't necessarily come with several responses. It sometimes doesn't even come through with words at all.

One of Jen's favorite sayings from me is, „Show, don't tell."

When she worried about what Savannah was really about, I didn't continue to try to persuade her with more talk. I truly took that phrase to heart and continued to demonstrate my commitment to her, to our relationship, and to elevating what Savannah was for us.

Actions speak volumes louder than the most vocal and eloquent of speeches. Words are meaningless and hollow without actions. They are fragile and frail, their promise broken sometimes with the simplest notions of impropriety. If you have hope that your new dynamic will survive and thrive, your partner needs to see that what you say is what you do.

TRUST FALLS

In business and in life, there are several suggestions that will help in trust building. Crossdressers, the following may help you during this tenuous time in your relationship.

1. Do what you say you're going to. Your promises must equal your actions.
2. Be consistent. As with anything, stability and continuity help to keep the mind at ease.
3. Listen. Make sure your partner feels heard. Try to understand her perspective before answering with your own.
4. When she makes a statement or has a question, first repeat back to her what you understand her to mean. A measure of clarity will save a lot of angst and unnecessary miscommunication.
5. Be direct. Don't beat around the bush. Don't dodge questions thrown at you.
6. Be caring. Give of yourself and sacrifice for your partner. Understand that her support of your crossdressing is (initially) a major sacrifice for what she understands her way of life to be.
7. Do the right thing. Talking about your crossdressing is an opportunity to better understand each other and yourself.
8. Be vulnerable. Opening yourself up to your partner shows that you are sincere in your efforts to be trustworthy.

SPACE ALLOCATION

The hope of all crossdressers is to have a full existence with the woman they love. To be accepted (to whatever degree is comfortable for both of you) is to be loved. In my case, I would love for Jen to see me under it all and not even distinguish a difference based on the clothes I wear or the make-up I apply. I love her with all of my heart and hope that she can love both of me with all of her heart. Of course, there is a defined difference between male and female personas, but I am still me under it.

For our relationship, we continue to be a work in progress. Sometimes I need to check myself and my expectations for what I want, focusing instead on acknowledging and feeling gratitude for our lives together at this moment. My word of advice is to always keep your head where your feet are, otherwise you find your mind dwelling in the mires of the past or staring at the unrealized expectations of the future.

In the here and now, Jen and I share clothes and makeup, she comes with me to private events and casual dinners with my gurlfriends (some of them with their own significant others). She sacrificed two of our apartment's three closets to accommodate both my male side and Savannah. I would like to think she has access to anything in Savannah's closet, so I consider it an even 50/50 split!

She still disagrees about the amount of body hair I have (I want less, she wants more – or at least for it to not be prickly on her skin. Gross!). We still try to be discrete when we leave the apartment, if only to keep the level of drama to a minimum.

There is comfort in having a measure of control over a situation when there seems to be a shortage of it. As a couple, it is important to keep a set of agreed upon rules in place for yourselves and others. It helps to keep disappointment low and expectations in perspective.

It also helps to keep you focused in the here and now, understanding where the boundaries are, and allowing for the mind to be freed up for the spontaneity of the present.

It seems counterintuitive.

I agree that it does sound incorrect. But let me illustrate with a personal anecdote. I want so much for Jen to interact with me as Savannah just like she does with my male persona. I love to kiss and hug Jen whenever the feeling strikes. When I am dressed as Savannah, that feeling doesn't just go away. She is still the woman I love.

One evening while we were out at an event, I spent much of the night calculating whether it would be okay to touch her leg or give her a hug or a kiss on the cheek. I was so wrapped up in that internal debate that I missed out on having gratitude that she was out with me in the first place. My mood was soured and I did nothing as a result to make Jen more comfortable with the experience.

Crossdressers, when your partners make room in their closets, remember that they are not just providing you more square footage in your home but are also giving you real estate in their heads and hearts. Do not make the extra space heavier with clutter than it needs to be for her – or you.

Be in the moment.

Be there for each other.

Crossdressers, please try to understand your partner's point of view. It should be easy since we claim that we are more in tune with women than the average male.

1.21. The Purge

Life is a great big canvas; throw all the paint you can at it.

~ Danny Kaye

Throw off your worries when you throw off your clothes at night.

~ Napoleon Bonaparte

EXPENSIVE PROPOSITION

Many men have gone through The Purge, that expensive and most-times futile attempt to be rid of the sickness that is crossdressing. By getting rid of the clothes that entice them to trade their masculinity with femininity, they hope for a fresh start at the gender they are born as. There are many reasons why crossdressers go through this process.

The first is that they feel in their hearts that they are sick. They do what any addict would do to kick the habit. Get rid of the offending things that enable the illness. Go cold turkey. Donate the clothes, heels, and wigs. Throw it all in a dumpster. Stay away from sites with crossdressing pictures and erotica. Reinvest in more masculine pursuits. Be more of a man!

Associated with the above, another reason is being caught by a shocked and angry spouse. In these cases, there is no talking it out or attempting to understand the compulsions of why they dress. It is a torrid affair. There is mistrust and an unwillingness to understand. Then comes the ultimatum. Choose the partner or the dressing. The crossdresser, with fear of losing all he holds dear, gets rid of everything that serves as a reminder of his femme self.

Some crossdressing men simply lose interest in dressing up. The urge to don their feminine attire fades and the clothes just sit around in boxes or storage. It may seem a waste to hold on to these articles and they are eventually given or thrown away. There is nothing sinister about the decisions. They are usually the result of space allocation and practicality.

The best form of purging is that of keeping up with current trends and good appearances. Unless you are rocking some in-style retro styles, it is best to leave the parachute pants and big hairdos to the 80s. Clothing get threadbare and torn, heels get scuffed and broken, and wigs get ratty and frayed. It is smart to keep up with current fashion as best you can. Remember that those old styles will come back around but in modified ways. I believe that staying a bit modern does offer a measure of passability for you and normalcy for your partner.

I AM NOT AN ANIMAL!

As you have read above, I referred to crossdressing as a sickness. I do NOT share that as one of my reasons for why I want to dress as a woman. I do not believe I have an illness or addictive compulsion to become Savannah. There was no trauma in my childhood that would shape me to want to escape into femininity. I am just me. And for me, that is reason enough.

Also, I do not hold to any modern religious conventions that my crossdressing is an abomination to the will of God. According to the church, I am debasing myself and focusing on my own wants and desires versus giving myself over to Jesus and to God. I cannot give

myself over to a deity that in the same breath offers compassion to all, but condemnation to those he and the Bible scribes as undesirable.

Alternative sexual orientation has become a non-issue and accepted among metropolitan and modern-thinking people. Does that mean that the church should continue to lead the charge against them? So many religious groups preach intolerance under the guise of love for all. The flavor of hypocrisy leaves a very bitter taste on my tongue.

For the non-fetish, non-transitioning crossdresser, our feminine and masculine sides are just part of our overall persona. We don't go out to hurt anyone. We only want to live a normal life.

1.22. What Is Normal?

In many countries today, moral and ethical norms are being reconsidered; national traditions, differences in nation and culture are being erased.

~ Vladimir Putin

The very ink with which history is written is merely fluid prejudice.

~ Mark Twain

FORCED PERSPECTIVE

I'm a hypocrite... pure and simple.

I believe myself to be a normal individual in every way. Even my desire to dress as a woman feels normal to me. And why wouldn't it feel as normal as the sound of my breathing or the rhythm of my heartbeat? My want to dress emerged years before any adolescent sexuality had made crossdressing a reward reinforced behavior. And, of course, I am going to side with me on matters such as these.

I'm not as cavalier as I may have been in my misspent youth, choosing to spend this period of my life reflecting on the whys and why not's of my existence and of my feminine side. I am more aware of how it affects others, especially the *normal* people. There was a time when I had a sense of entitlement about Savannah, but now I strive to strike balance in my life about all things – my work, my relationship, my passions and, yes, my crossdressing.

We all possess a perspective shaped by our own beliefs, environment, and experiences. Not everyone enjoys the same television programs, movies or sporting events. Some people don't enjoy sports at all! No one takes away the same enlightenment from reading poetry or gets the same raw emotion from a painting hung in a gallery. There are hundreds of music genres and plenty of ears to enjoy each melody.

And while we each like what we like, we don't necessarily care for what others like. We shouldn't hold malice for each other's tastes and preferences. Of course, that is not true when it comes to what our parents and grandparents considered that „noise you kids listen to".

ENLIGHTENMENT

What is normal about gender identity? As newer generations become more familiar and educated about alternative sexual orientations and gender identifications, the stigma of what those labels represent fades a bit and acceptance emerges. As we begin to form friendships with people with these labels, we realize that they are just that... people.

Our brains have an inherent need to categorize. With our five senses, we have a sensory overload of data that our brain processes and files away in different parts of our gray matter. In order to understand something new, the brain searches its memory for what that new thing most likely resembles. So, if the brain is familiar with drag queens and gay men, then the crossdressing man must fall under the same label based on similar attributes.

The pursuit of knowledge is unnecessary to most people because there typically is no reason to understand it beyond its generalities. It doesn't affect them in life so they remain

oblivious to any other information on the subject. The problem arises when the person is confronted with the unknown and must make a quick determination based on the knowledge (or misinformation) they already possess.

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS

In the last thirty to forty years, the homosexual community has made great strides for education and integration into society, gaining acceptance. But education is only as productive as the passion for the pursuit of that knowledge. As individuals took claim of their sexual identities and revealed themselves to those closest to them, the people they confided in now had an interest and responsibility to become educated defenders.

More recently, the transsexual community found itself in the spotlight with Chaz Bono (formerly Chastity) and Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce). Countless other members of the community have also come forward. All were tortured with their true identities trapped in the wrong gender shell, finally deciding to make right what they considered wrong. Again, those closest to them tried to learn more. They asked questions and read literature. They chose to better understand their loved one's transsexual experience, finally willing and ready to hear their words.

As more people reveal their alternative sexual orientation or their true gender identity, more members of their family and friends become champions for them. It is easy to disown and to ostracize; it is difficult to expand one's understanding and acceptance of something foreign and new. It is even more challenging to defend loved ones against attack from others.

But it's an important pursuit.

Just like others in the rainbow spectrum of the LGBTQ community, the crossdresser is looking for acceptance. We don't want to continue to live in secret and under the glare of intolerance. Religious dogma plagues and vilifies us, ignorance mislabels us, and mischaracterization destroys the strength of our character.

We face the same challenges as those who have come before us, with one added wrinkle. I am not talking about my crow's feet or the laugh lines around my mouth, although those are pressing issues as well! While people have begun to wrap their minds around the concepts of sexual orientation and of transitioning individuals, they still furrow their brows with a puzzled expression as to why crossdressers do what they do.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Understanding why a man loves a man or a woman loves a woman, or why a man wants to be a woman or a woman wants to be a man is becoming easier. The concept of why a man wants to dress as a woman for a few days a week or month is still difficult to contemplate. If the man isn't 1) gay, or 2) looking to transition to womanhood, then... why does he love to put on a bra and panties (if its not a fetish)?

Well, I don't have a really good answer for you. It could be a compulsion. I have heard that it must be an addiction. Perhaps because some crossdressers started doing it during puberty, they developed a sensory reward complex that made them want to do it again and again. There are emerging medical claims that theorize that the brain's chemistry and

development play a part. There are many theories and studies that could be true or, at least, contributing factors.

Crossdressers flirt with the line between masculinity and femininity. We are chameleon in nature, able to change our outward appearance as the mood strikes. We walk a line in a pair of heels as well as we do in a pair of beat up Air Jordan Nike sneakers. For me, I can sport my Miami Vice Don Johnson scruff just as well as my Clinique liquid foundation and chubby black mascara. Conversely, I admit that I have more enjoyment when shopping for Savannah clothes, while my male side shopping is economical and disinterested in current fashion.

The beauty of being me – besides my physical awesomeness, haha – is that I can dance the night away with my gurlfriends on a Wednesday night as Savannah before returning to the workforce the next morning as drab ole me to clickity-clack on the keyboard for eight to ten hours. There is a measure of satisfaction in knowing I am not tied to one gender or the other.

For the gay and lesbian community, they discovered to whom they are attracted. The folks in the transitioning transgender community discovered who they were on the inside and decided to what degree they wanted to present themselves on the outside. Being of two genders does not make me better or worse than any other social group. It simply allows me freedom to be who I want to be without the need for permanence.

1.23. Balancing Acts

The cynic finds love with the idealist. The rebel with the conformist. The social butterfly with the bookworm. They help each other balance their lives.

~ Joyce Brothers

Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.

~ Thomas Merton

STARTING LINES

In order to lead a balanced life it is important to understand what the term means. It seems so easy a concept. But balance is like chess. It takes minutes to learn and years to master. Visualize a scale like you would see with the blind woman of justice – your balance scale of life – and visualize that it has several pans that hold the different components of your existence instead of just the two.

Now ask yourself a question. Do you have every element of your life in alignment and in perfect synchronicity? Are all the pans perfectly level with equal weight around the fulcrum? Or do you feel that you are being pulled or pushed too hard in any one direction? If you have a sense of being dragged down or that you haven't given enough weight to one of your pans of life, you may need to reassess your life's balance.

Keep in mind, though, that balance doesn't come in equal measure. Each component is not measured in units of time but in quality of its use. When you are in balance you experience a sense of calm, grounding and contentment. You feel more positive. Feelings of resentment don't creep into your head to nag you with an itch of dissatisfaction.

With crossdressing, there must be equilibrium. I bet the men reading this book are all smiles as they point out this sentence to their partner and say, *See? Savannah says I need equilibrium!*

BALANCING THE SCALES

As with anything worth pursuing in life, equilibrium does not exist in a vacuum. Balance exists both internally and externally. Your sense of peace is for you alone, an internal balance that only you can master. Your surroundings, experiences and the people around you affect your external balance. Internal balance is the calm that you master for the health of your body, mind and spirit.

- Balance the pursuit of knowledge against a quiet mind.
- Balance of giving and receiving love. It validates that we aren't isolated from the world. Outward love starts from within us. And we can only accept love if we allow it in.
- Balance of the physical body means eating well and proper exercise. It also involves treating yourself to... you guessed it... treats. To push the body too hard or to deny an indulgent experience is a surefire way to be unbalanced.

Internal balance is difficult enough, but there are all of the external elements to consider. What are those external things that are important to your fulfillment as a person?

- Having a good job and making money? Financial goals are great, but to push too hard in business without stopping a moment to take in the grander landscape of life is not balance.
- Having a family with two and a half kids, a dog, and a picket fence? Being responsible for your family and their health, but forgetting about being responsible for yourself is not balance.
- Cutting loose out on the town having a great time with friends? If that is all you are accomplishing, you will eventually burn out. And that (say it with me) is not balance.

That all sounds too hard, Savannah! Just thinking about juggling of all those things is stressing me out!

And you would be right if we intended to look at a life-size balance all at once. Balance is fluid and ever changing. The things that make you feel a sense of calm change as you change. Each of the elements I mentioned above is positive, but taken to selfish extremes is not.

So when are we going to talk about my need to crossdress?

Yeah! When are we going to get my crossdressing partner to realize it isn't all about him?

COMING TO AN ACCORD

In the comments on the previous page lie the challenges for striking a balance between a crossdresser and his partner. So how do you do it? As we have discussed, everything needs to start on a level mental playing field. In the following pages, I am going to assume a scenario where the crossdresser has revealed himself to his partner. Where you go from here is up to you, but I hope I can give you a few tips to help make the transition easier.

First, crossdressers, be honest with yourself. Take a deep dive into the pool of understanding who you are and what makes you happy in life. If you're unsure of what you want, seeking therapy or an outside opinion may help to ground your thinking on the subject. If you cannot be honest with yourself and your partner, you already have a strike against you.

For you, dear partner, be honest with your crossdressing man. Share your thoughts and fears in as healthy a way as possible. I know that your heart is filled with trepidation and your head is filled with questions, but tackle one thing at a time in a way that is not demeaning or sharply edged toward him.

Next, start the examination process. You have both stated your sides, are processing intense emotions and fears, and have hundreds of questions to have answered. How can crossdressing become part of a balance between you? When will you experience the feelings of being pushed too far or pulled too far?

You will both feel mentally out of balance at this point. This is the uncomfortable stage where you both feel you are sacrificing too much for the other. The scales are weighing down on the other end of the fulcrum against you.

Don't despair.

Examine and intellectualize what you believe your balance to look like. Ask yourself, how will you achieve equilibrium for yourself and your partner that reflects that ideal? Both sides need to come to the table with what they believe to be appropriate.

Crossdressers, beware the Pink Fog. Do not mistake your partner's silence or agreement to mean that she is completely against or onboard with every idea and fantasy you have. You should not think that you now have the green light to race two hundred mile per hour into the feminine abyss.

Partners, you also cannot allow your inherent fears to wholly guide your decision-making. Rash judgments may unfairly curb what your crossdressing partner is allowed to do. Try to be a part of his development, not fight blindly against it.

You are trying to build a balance of understanding, acceptance and exploration that will be a positive experience for both of you.

So, how do we do that, Savannah?

Simple. Set goals and make plans. Set aside time to develop a familiarity (a routine) between you. Crossdressers, this is the time where you will probably start to dress for your partner as part of a full reveal for her. She may want to watch you transform or she may want to be waiting in the living room to see you fully dressed. Either way, this should be done in a controlled and safe environment, whether at home or on neutral ground. Take the experience slow.

Do not let emotional expectations rule the day. Take each step as small steppingstones. Do not harbor fear. But if fear does rears its head, talk about it. Discuss it. Be honest, as it is always the best policy. You may find that you talk for a couple hours as a couple, forgetting that you both are dressed as women.

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Your first experience is over.

What now, Savannah?

Reflect on what occurred.

- How did you handle the experience?
- Did you listen to what your partner had to say about it?
- How did you handle your own fears?
- How did you convey those feelings to your partner?
- How did you receive that criticism and respond to it?
- What are the thoughts for moving forward from here?

Remember, you have now shared an experience. Have gratitude for it. You may have been nervous, crossdresser. Your partner may have been filled with dread, fears and expectations. Reflect on the positivity of the event. You shared yourself with her. You, hopefully, spoke more in depth about tangential topics of crossdressing. Crossdresser, thank your partner for her part. Remember that this experience is not just about what you want. Don't forget that your partner is trying to recreate and modify what she considered was her balance in life; what she considered normal.

Be prepared.

Get together as a couple and set the ground rules for the immediate future. I know that sounds too rigid, not allowing for spontaneity and freedom of spirit. But, I assure you it is essential to set the groundwork for spontaneity.

What the heck are you talking about?

Well, for Jen and me, I told her that I wanted a relationship between us that rivaled what we had as man and woman, something with more intimacy. She was not prepared with that line of thinking. So we set ground rules. We were to be best girlfriends when out in public. If she felt comfortable with holding my hand or giving me a kiss or hug, she would initiate the affection. Although difficult to start thinking that way on my part, it allowed for both of us to know what was okay and what was just expectation that would preoccupy my head with what ifs.

Preparations set the stage for empowerment.

Each of you is still dealing with the shifting weights on the scales, trying to get the scale pans to settle. This will be an ongoing process as smaller weights are added and removed. Just like that doctor's office beam scale where the nurse slides the bigger weight rider across the beam notches then follows with the smaller weight on the second beam, the balance will come with incremental adjustments until the pointer settles on the centerline. Keep setting goals and ground rules. You will find that these efforts will allow you to do something groundbreaking in your partnership.

Always work together.

Work together to improve; to connect; to communicate. Share your feelings and concerns to each other in an open and loving way. You are together because you care for each other, and want the best for each other. Allow your partner to help challenge and vanquish your demons, as well as celebrate every success and have gratitude for every moment, too.

Keep it all in perspective.

1.24. Haters Hate

Let no man pull you so low as to hate him.

~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Love is the master key that opens the gates of happiness, of hatred, of jealousy, and, most easily of all, the gate of fear.

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

_____

READING THE LABELS

Crossdressers belong to the larger umbrella of the LGTBQ community. The acronym currently stands for Lesbian, Gays, Transgender, Bisexual, and Questioning. The letters attempts to describe a diverse group of people with alternative sexual orientations and gender identities. Besides LGTB and Q are other letters that represent additional sub-groups that belong to the community.

A is for asexual. G can be used for gender queer instead of gay, and other designations such as gender creative or gender fluid. Q can also stand for queer. There is a letter for ‚inter-sexual' and ‚pan-sexual'. Every year the letters of the alphabet end up describing new groups.

It took years of education and understanding for me to decide to ride the coattails of the label of crossdresser. We used to be called transvestites, coined by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910. It was always a more clinical term, especially since it comes from the Latin trans, meaning „across" or „over", and vestitus, meaning „dressed" (Gross! Latin!). The term transvestite, or the slang tranny, was considered a dirty word when I grew up.

It wasn't until my mid-twenties that I recognized and spoke the word aloud for myself. It was a momentous day of acceptance for me and for my self-assignment to a larger community. Of course, I never really liked the word transvestite and eventually gravitated to the softer moniker of crossdresser. Even at that time, my acceptance of the label was still based on misunderstood and limited information.

IT'S NOT EUPHORIC

There were dozens of other descriptive titles that I had never heard of or fully understood their meaning. Gender Dysphoria is the condition of feeling that one's emotional and psychological identity as a male or female is opposite of their biological assignment. Gender fluidity relates to a person who does not identify as having a fixed or permanent gender. Pan-sexuals do not limit themselves or their sexual choices based on their biology. There are dozens more, and new labels popping up all the time.

It is a daunting task to understand all of the labels out there and to find one that fits you. Many of us try on more than one title through our lives, hoping to find that one that describes us the best. There is an inherent flaw to this line of thinking, however.

All of these labels are wrought with their own shroud of limits and expectations. Some of the labels are exclusive of each other, with some defining a sexual preference and others

defining a gender preference. How does one navigate through all of the available information to see what group one belongs?

A bigger problem as I see it is the labels themselves. Why do we need a label at all? Sure, we seek out classifications because our brains strive to have a basic foundation of who we are, but we don't have to live or limit ourselves to the tenets of those labels. We should understand that we have the ability to transcend the shackles of those labels – and become something more than the simple sum of our parts.

WAR AGAINST THE STATE (OF BEING)

It's of the utmost importance that you strive to discover who you are, dear crossdresser. Once you have found a measure of peace, you are ready to include your partner in such matters as well. She is your confidant and, most times, more wise than you are willing to admit. Even if you are struggling to come to terms with who you wholly are, having a strong support system is crucial.

So, you have gotten that all out of the way. You now know who you are on the transgender spectrum. Congratulations! All seems right with the world. You are content. Your partner is coming along on this strange ride with you, to your utter amazement. So what else is there to worry about?

Every day is a reassessment of who you are and how your partner is coping. Every day is an affirmation that you are appropriately 1) selfish to your needs and, 2) selfless to the needs of your partner. It is you two against a world that fears us (taken straight out of context from any of a dozen Marvel X-Men comics).

The problem is that there is a big, uneducated, biased world out there. I know that some of us are lucky enough to have a circle of friends and family that supports and loves us unconditionally. There still is judgment and ridicule from many sides and from the oddest of sources.

We understand there will be resistance and resentment from those in our lives that don't have the knowledge or experience to accept us. Whom we confide in is based on the person's temperament, capacity for sympathy and empathy, and open mindedness. This is a dance we know the steps to, all too well. Although the closer the person is in our hearts, the more difficult it is to see the right next step to sharing, sometimes.

Most of us will never reveal our full self to our grandparents, parents, or siblings. It is just a burden that we do not wish to pass on to them, unnecessarily. Speaking for myself, I was proud to share my alternative feminine side to my sister. But I would be hard pressed to come up with a good reason to tell my parents.

SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Friends, family and co-workers aside, there are other groups that we expect would rally behind us crossdressers. Focusing on social media – the place where all judgment and bullying is done at the end of a keystroke – I must shed light on a strange and hard truth. There are those in our own LGBTQ community that hold animosity against us.

I don't understand why, Savannah? I'm just a crossdresser!

Within the spectrum of alternative lifestyles, there are some that consider us less than. There are many reasons, I am sure. They may not comprehend why we do what we do. Remember when you thought that wearing women's clothes meant that you must be a homosexual or want to become a woman fulltime? There are some gays and transitioning individuals that also think that one of those two criteria must be at play.

A gay man may believe that we dress as women in order to attract men. Therefore, we must be using crossdressing as a cover to deny that we are also homosexual. Many transsexual men used crossdressing as their testing grounds to become comfortable with the idea that they should have been born a woman. Crossdressing for them was a gateway to their true gender nature. Therefore, we must also be in denial about our true gender identity.

Don't get me wrong. I have dozens of friends as discussed above, none of whom has ever treated me with any less respect and love than I showed them. Yet, there still persists a small but outspoken and angry voice of condemnation towards crossdressers.

These voices make their positions known through their social media postings. Their opinions seem to mostly be slanted toward the political and human rights arenas. These transsexual women spout venom against the lowly crossdressing males that have offended them. They point out that we are not serious about our gender identities.

How could that be? Aren't we all on the same side of things?

You would think so, but that assumption would be incorrect in these specific cases. Some transsexual women consider us hobbyists, semi-serious, or in denial about our true feminine identity. The reasons may stem from the fact that they understand what crossdressing meant to their own transition and are projecting those experiences onto us. I recognize that these women understand life based on how they have lived and what experiences led them to their own critical life decisions. But that is a very narrow point of view that does not allow for any other perspectives ... or for other reasons why people may enjoy crossdressing.

They condemn us out of fear and ignorance of who we are in comparison to them. Gay men and women continue to fight for their rights for civil union, equality in the workplace, and protection against discrimination. Transsexual women are also fighting for equal rights under the laws of the country, waist deep in the fight against discrimination and for proper health care (and other issues).

Their complaint is that we, the crossdressers, give them a bad name. Remember some of the crossdressing types that a man could be? Think of how those crossdressers are perceived in public. The general populace is not ready for a bearded man in a skirt (except the Scots and their kilts) or a businessman who enjoys wearing tights under his dress pants.

The perception ranges from embarrassment to avoidance by *regular* folk. Since transsexual MtF women strive to be normal women, they see our behaviors as stumbling blocks to their own social acceptance in everyday life and on Capital Hill. They consider us part time feminine enthusiasts at best, masquerading around in all our fetish and inappropriate glory for the night, before we slip back into our privileged male lives. All the while, these transsexual women are fighting for their right to live as women everyday.

WHAT MAKES A WOMAN?

I am all for equal rights for all groups that need special protections and accommodations due to ongoing ignorance and intolerance. The world is too big and diverse to want otherwise. We crossdressers are often frowned upon because we are able to slip back and forth across the lines between male and female. We enjoy both the privileges of being a man and the benefits of being a woman.

Does that make us less committed to our gender identities? I don't think so. Does that make us less of a woman? Maybe. Since we flirt between both identities, it does put crossdressers on a different layer of the spectrum than transsexual women.

I spend one to two hours at a clip to properly become Savannah and be proud of the persona I am presenting. I'm always concerned that I will fail to pass casual inspection by the masses, fearing scorn and disapproval from the public. Is the discipline to my feminine craft any less real and committed than the transsexual woman's pursuits of her own womanhood? I know that I don't think like a woman 24 hours a day, hence a critical distinction to the crossdresser's journey from that of a transsexual woman.

We are considered *less than* by some because we choose not to pursue a single permanence to our gender identity. We're able to lace up a corset and dance the night away, then strip down to our male suited business casual Polo and khakis for a day on the job. Is it fair to be thought that we are unsure of our identity just because we choose to embrace our gender duality?

The real question is, why is it a matter of fairness? Why can't we all subscribe to be the person we want to be? Should people be judged for their beliefs and decisions, especially when they are not disruptive or a negative influence to others around them? It is sad to realize that there is an abundance of backbiting within the LGBTQ community. Please remember that this is not a social commentary for all members of the community, only directed to those most vocal about their disdain for those they do not consider fit to bear the labels of transgender.

There are post-operative transsexuals that pass judgment on pre-operative transsexuals for not being serious enough about becoming women. Some members of both of the aforementioned groups pass judgment on non-transitioning crossdressers for not acknowledging their secret unknown desire to be women. And, of course, we non-fetish crossdressers pass judgment on some of the more *out there* crossdressing groups for giving us a bad name when they are in public.

You see how the crap all rolls downhill. There is a strange assumption that the transsexuals with SRS (sexual reassignment surgery) are the pinnacles of the male to female expression. Agreed that they are certainly the most extreme measure of attaining femininity, but we all demonstrate our femininity in the best way we understand how to do so. Again, remember to find your balance. If you feel that mental push or pull that makes you uncomfortable or stressed, you are not in alignment with your authentic self. Interestingly, as some men transition into a more surgical expression of womanhood, you will find that they fade away from the crossdresser community events in general. They have become their

normal. Therefore, they do not feel the need to continue associating with those they have transcended from. They have found their balance.

Just A Crossdresser

Let us go back to the earlier question.

I don't understand why, Savannah? I'm just a crossdresser!

Number one, you are not just anything. You are a person, first and foremost. The label of crossdresser does not devalue who you are in relation to someone else in the community hierarchy. In fact, there is no hierarchy, only different groups of individuals striving to find their place in the world. Never allow other community labels to create chaos and discontent within your own heart. The knowledge of one's self is yours alone.

Second, be the best you that you can be. Be honest with yourself and with the others you have chosen to share your gender identity with. Always be reflective about where you are on your journey. Are you still on the road? Do you see your destination? Or have you already checked into the hotel of your gender identity and are sipping Mai Tais by the pool?

Lastly, have respect. Have respect for yourself and for others around you. This obviously includes those closest to you in your life, but also should include those who come in contact with you in either form you choose to present. We are our own worst enemies when it comes to acceptance on the larger stage of life. Hold your head high, have confidence, be understanding, and be kind (and remember to rewind!).

1.25. My Better Half

Everything has its beauty but not everyone sees it.

~ Confucius

Friends show their love in times of trouble, not in happiness.

~ Euripides

SHOW AND TELL

Hopefully, the preceding stories of crossdressers and their partners trying to survive or thrive gives you some insight that you can do the same for yourselves. I won't try to convince you that every relationship works. I can't tell you that everything will just fall into place and you will live happily ever after. But I can tell you that an open heart, an honest and full dialogue, and a will to find the deeper meaning within each other and us will provide you the strongest foundation and best chance to succeed.

And why shouldn't we succeed? The best things we have going for us is our love for each other – whatever form we take – and having a deeper understanding of our partners. For us crossdressers, we try to become the best version of ourselves. I don't mean to say that we are only the best version of ourselves when dressed as women. If that were how we were thinking, we should probably be on the path to full womanhood. Instead, I am only trying to illustrate that by understanding our duality we allow ourselves to empathize with others in a way that some men never will.

The trouble with crossdressers (gasp, I am actually admitting this?!) is that we sometimes lose sight and perspective of others when we dress. Many times it is all about us. If we still dress in secret, those scarce moments are a euphoric series of obsessive minutes or hours that are strung together to get our *fix*, like an addict.

Because we tend to feel that we are still considered undesirables and misunderstood by most groups, we have a sense that we must fulfill our feminine needs behind closed doors. The urge to hide our authentic selves from those closest to us is a slippery slope of secrecy that will eventually gnaw away at our happiness and bond with our loved ones.

This doesn't mean that we should go out and tell the world who we are. There are many crossdressers that apply a ‚Need to Know' philosophy to who they tell. Do your aging parents need to know you dress as a woman from time to time? Is there a value to telling? You may have shared your secret with them, but now they have to cope with that knowledge and wrestle with sharing or keeping that secret too. They could commiserate with each other, if told, but why tell? You need to weigh the reasons why sharing is important.

In the revealing department, I usually follow my heart. I reveal myself to my partner on the day that I know there is long-term potential for the relationship. I usually say it's because I'm too lazy to lie about who I am, but I feel that full disclosure is more important than a relationship built on what I feel would be a shoddy foundation. For friends and family, I usually get a Savannah-sense (trademark pending!) in my heart that says, ‚You should share Savannah

with this person'. I then think on it for a bit before deciding to either expand my Savannah family or continue to keep *her* to myself.

THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

This chapter is not about sharing with others.

Sorry about the tangential thinking.

Actually... wait... this chapter is about sharing. It is about sharing the best parts of us with others. The name of the chapter is entitled Our Better Half, for goodness sake. We want to share our better half with our better half. There is nothing I wouldn't give for a full relationship with Jen, both of us in love with every facet of the other. I am a hopeless optimist and romantic that way.

I think it is important to strive to be the Better Half. In that, I mean we should exude our best qualities regardless of our attire. Why should the clothing diminish the caliber of the moral character we present to the world? Clothing is an expression of us; it does not dictate a cookie cutter stereotype. Empathy and kindness do not require the presence of a garter belt to be conveyed (although it sometimes helps!).

As a man I am sensitive. I defer to others and listen to what they have to say. I am quiet and reserved, willing to speak up when I feel I have enough information to give a quality and intelligent response. I am empathetic. I am an introvert in some new social situations, but can be very outgoing when I am comfortable with my surroundings.

As Savannah, I am sensitive. I defer to others and list–

Wait!

Are you telling me you were going to spit out the same attributes as Savannah as you did for your male side?

Of course! I am essentially the same person, regardless of what I am wearing. The clothing only allows me to be the fuller version of me.

Wait. What?

I know it's confusing. Believe me, it's confusing for us crossdressers, too. Most of us will never be able to sit down with our partner and adeptly answer that one pressing question, „Why do you do it?" We dress because it feels right.

Feels good, you mean.

Yes, dressing does feel good.

But it also feels right.

It seems normal to us. There is something that drives us. Call it addiction, compulsion, or any of a number of other terms to describe the desire to dress. But at the end of the day, it is still just us as us. To deny who we are could be catastrophic to our sense of wellbeing and our sense of happiness. If dressing provides us comfort and a measure of calm and confidence, then it may help to illustrate the idea that a male crossdressers' femininity is an extension of his whole self. I do not have multiple personalities, but I do have more freedom to express myself as Savannah. I touch more (although Jen can attest that I am pretty touchy-feely no matter what) when around both men and women, am more confident to dance and let myself

loose a bit, and may listen to what people have to say more than I usually do (which I feel is a lot, even in male mode).

Crossdressing allows for an escape from the stresses of everyday life. The act of dressing is ritualistic in nature, filled with movements that can serve to center us. If I'm not rushed to get ready for an outing, I find the act of *becoming* Savannah just as therapeutic as *being* Savannah. The motions of applying foundation and eye shadow are calming. The donning of a wig and bodycon dress is like armor against the hordes of stresses and fears laying siege at the gates of the kingdom.

Where we find solace in lace, satin and silk, real women may find the same comfort in an old oversized sweatshirt from college or a favorite pair of yoga pants or, maybe, a pair of fuzzy bunny slippers. We are drawn to what we are drawn to – no matter our gender. And speaking of gender, I'm not forgetting the most important Better Half. I have just decided to save the best for last.

THE BEST HALF

This is where I would usually start gushing about Jen. She would start rolling her eyes at my mushiness and accolades; only partially believing what I say about her is true. Much of the time she simply doesn't believe those things in herself.

In some of my reading for enlightenment, I have come across the notion that we are so bristled at our own identity and in the belief of who we think we are that we cannot pull ourselves out of our own perspective.

Have you ever received a compliment? Has someone said something nice about your clothes or hair? I'm sure that you have. Have you found yourself saying, „What? This old thing?" or „Thanks, but it cost me a fortune for this haircut!"? What you're doing is deflecting the compliment because you do not believe in its sincerity. Not because you think the person who complimented you is being unkind or sarcastic, but because you don't believe in the truth of the words as they relates to you.

Keep that in mind the next time someone says something nice about you. In a cynical world, I'm sure there could be an endgame for every compliment. But in my world, I choose to accept the compliment with a „Thank you", even if I may not believe the kind words being spoken.

Eventually, you will believe.

In the meanwhile, I will continue to shower my girlfriend with the acclaim and compliments she rightly deserves. She has sacrificed much when she agreed to continue our relationship. She could have had a normal relationship with a nice guy without the baggage of a make-up case and an additional closet full of feminine clothes.

That is my belief.

But is it a truth?

Maybe she loves me because she sees that I am someone more evolved than the *normal* guy. I mean, my girlfriend never has to worry about being a football season widow (not to say that crossdressers can't be sports fanatics), she doesn't have to worry about washing dishes

after spending an hour cooking, getting something girlie for the bedroom, or me getting into a macho bullshit pissing contest with another dude, etc.

She loves me because of who I am, even if she is still coming to terms with the feminine presentation. Savannah is a façade that hides the masculinity that she is attracted to but, after some time with me as *her*, those walls are slowly starting to come down.

There is a good reason that Jen is my better half. After our first romantic encounter's infamous words, „Hey, I have something to show you", Jen read all she could on the subject and sought out SOCD (significant others of crossdressers) websites and forums in an effort to find support and information. She was smart to NOT jump in headlong after the reveal.

What do you mean, ‚smart'?

When some CD partners jump in with both feet in an attempt to support their men, they may find that they are overwhelmed with the onslaught of new information and revelations. When jumping in so quickly (and blindly, maybe), the partners are setting up a bar of expectation for their crossdressers. Suddenly, all of the men's hopes and fantasies are coming true. He is so happy that she is happy right along side him. That is, until there comes an episode, question, or situation that halts her in her tracks.

Imagine you are in a dragster (maybe a little pun intended) waiting for the starting tree of lights to blink from red to yellow to green. You find out about your partner's crossdressing (light turns green) and hit the accelerator. Wheels spin, smoke billows out and you defy the laws of proper speed limits as you race down the track (outings, events, romantic encounters with your CD). Then, he brings up some stray comment about a fear of transitioning. Your dragster has just hit the side barricades at over two hundred miles per hour. You will survive the experience of the crash, but that moment of impact is going to hurt.

Jen took the opposite approach. Since she had never been in a dragster, she harnessed in, tried to familiarize herself with the cockpit instruments (still funny!), and started taking test runs down the track. She backed up the dragster to the starting line after each run until she felt comfortable for a real head-to-head race.

That analogy was exhausting... and exhilarating!

Truth be told, I was afraid that the slow pace was an admission that Jen would never warm up to the idea of being in a relationship with a crossdresser. We have spent a couple years gaining momentum... and we are not even close to hitting top speed (or red-lining, thank goodness). She was smart in her approach, in terms of how she needed to deal with this new knowledge. A new normal does not just happen overnight.

THE NEW NORMAL

Jen is definitely dealing with the notion that she and I can be the new normal. And that paradigm shift is not something that happens instantly. For some, like with Melissa and Annabelle, there was no shift in thinking because Annabelle was already attuned to alternative lifestyle living. For others, for the vast majority of women, there has already been established a way of thinking – men wear male clothes, women wear female clothes.

Fascinating, really. What the heck is a paradigm shift again?

A paradigm shift (pronounced „pair a dime“) is defined as a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions. It is when behavior is permanently altered based on a new dynamic. A perfect modern example of a paradigm shift is the invention of the smartphone. Look at any teenager or urban professional and you will find them staring at their iPhone or Android checking emails, taking selfies, getting directions, and playing Candy Crush. Fast becoming extinct is the need for Rand McNally maps when traveling, needing to be at our desks to be connected to the office, or saving shoeboxes full of memories.

Redefining the way to view how people are *supposed* to dress is a difficult concept to shake off. Early in Jen's life (as a reminder), she came home from work to find her partner sitting on the couch with a shaved body and attired in lingerie and garters. It was a shock and off-putting. She went away and put it out of her mind. It was wrong for him to be wearing women's clothes. That was not how the world worked. Men were masculine and women were feminine.

How do you break that social construct? How do you break the idea that men must be masculine? I mean, women can have masculine traits. Tomboy girls are accepted. Jen told me that she was brought up to believe that men were the superior gender, ruling the world. She made the comment that it didn't matter if women were superior to men in every way, because, in the end, the dominating intelligence and cunning of a woman would never trump the closed fists of a man.

In that example, the only reason that men are superior is because they can beat each other up. Isn't that how wars are waged? And doesn't that mean that women would have to compete with men on their masculine level in order to feel that they are worthy of trust and equality of any kind? So, here we crossdressers sit with our partners wondering how to accept a man that would give up all of his male superiority in order to affect a feminine persona.

SETTING THE GROUND RULES

Like Debra and Eden, Jen set some dress code ground rules early. She didn't want me to wear overly frilly or lacy panties, or anything too feminine in color. She didn't want me to wear lingerie or nightgowns to bed.

I was crushed that I was forced to be stifled from the freedom to wear what I wanted. But I abided the rules for the sake of the relationship and for the simple fact that she allowed us to continue in the first place (remember, we crossdressers don't feel worthy a lot of the time, anyway, so we grasp at the hope that we and our partners will succeed). The rules, once in place, weren't terrible concessions to make. I didn't try to overdo my dressing in front of her. That allowed Jen to slowly reshape what she thought of a man in female clothes.

She would see me wearing simple cut women's underwear. She became desensitized to it. But not desensitized in a bad way. She described it as making the visual and cognitive connection „no big deal, anymore“. Jen even said to me that she found it an „interesting phenomenon how while it still feels weird to see you in panties, the thought of seeing you in boxers or tightie whities seems even more weird“.

That is an important component to this re-education process (that sounds ominous, Clockwork Orange fans, doesn't it?). Instead of negative reinforcement, Jen was able to become accustomed to my *low-grade* dressing because nothing bad happened. I didn't surprise her fully dressed as Savannah, demanding kinky sex (like her previous experience). My dressing might have been the beat of a butterfly's wings in China, but no tsunami blew through the California coast as a result.

So that level of dressing became the new normal.

There wasn't much discussion about what was an appropriate next step. I asked how I would know when she was comfortable with my dressing. She shrugged and told me that we would both know when it happened. I would push the boundaries a little bit from time to time, testing the acceptance waters. When it became too much – when my three steps forward became her two steps back – we readjusted to what was tolerable.

Never wear tights on the couch to watch television for three evenings in a row, gurlfriends. Just giving you a heads-up! That's what happened. She spoke up that she wasn't feeling comfortable with my choice to dress. The first day she was ok with it. The second day she was troubled, but didn't say anything because she didn't feel it was her right to demand what I should be able to wear in our own home. By the third day, her reservations about keeping quiet were overwhelmed by her own need to „be ok".

It's a compromise, as is anything worthwhile. Compromise, with understanding, is one of the cornerstones for anyone in a relationship. Remember the ideas for balance in one's life. All of those lessons are compounded when you need to take into account the feelings and needs of another person.

Jen and I still test the boundaries of normalcy. We go to transgender-friendly restaurants for GNO (Girls' Night Out) with other crossdressers and their partners. The other patrons at the restaurant pay us no mind. The restaurant staff loves us and treats us wonderfully. Nothing bad happens. Positive reinforcement happens.

Presto! A new normal happens.

Jen can look back two or three years and see that she's not the same person that she was. Her views on the world, on the crossdressing community, and on me have fundamentally changed. Maybe in another year Jen will be sitting in Outback Steakhouse with Savannah and reminisce about that silly phase of our relationship where she was worried that people would be offended, judgmental, or angry at the sight of us.

Oh, silly us!

There is nothing to say that something bad can't happen. There can always be a stray outspoken or drunk individual whose ignorance drives his or her bigotry and venom toward our kind. Jen could experience that negative reaction and stumble a step or two, but she can still be confident that she has set the forms and poured the concrete under her for curing foundation. For her, it is important to have a solid base so that when bad things happen, she can be confident in her own convictions to take on all comers.

Patience is a virtue – perhaps the greatest virtue.

For you, dear crossdresser, it is important to have patience, understanding and recognition for what your partner is going through as she walks on the path of this journey with you. She is coping with her own tolerance and acceptance as she strives to become accustomed to what she considers her new normal. Crossdressers, if you are reading this... don't screw it up!

LAST WORDS ON THE SUBJECT

The idea that crossdressing is normal is a notion that may never materialize. Members of the gay and lesbian community enjoy a measure of acceptance. Transitioning men and women are starting to be recognized with a growing understanding, if not total acceptance. Both groups are considered by most to be ‚born that way'.

Non-transitioning crossdressers are looked at as having a choice. We keep a foot in both the masculine and feminine worlds. With no proof that crossdressers are wired differently from normal folk, we are considered just a bunch of weirdos who like to get off by wearing frocks and panties. Would society see us in a better light if it were clinically proven that we were psychologically and mentally wired different from other men? Would we be more accepted? Or would the general public see us as creatures worthy of their pity? Maybe, they would try to cure us like religion and medicine tried to do in the past for homosexual men and women?

It is still too early to tell. We will have to keep each other informed. Stay tuned.

1.26. Sex, Lies & Videotape

Unexpressed emotion will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.

~ Sigmund Freud

No man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit.

~ Ansel Adams

_____

DEAR DIARY

Hey, Savannah?

Yes, dear reader?

Why are crossdressers so into themselves?

Why do you ask?

Because Facebook is rampant with trashy pics of crossdressers in bars acting slutty.

What makes you think they are acting?

Ba-dum-bum! Hey-ooh!

Sorry, that was silly and a forced dialogue for a cheesy punch line. Wait... did I just say ‚cheesy'? That sounds like a segue to me.

Many crossdressers love to snap pictures of themselves and their friends while out. They love to post to their Instagram, SnapChat and Facebook pages (and to whatever social media will be in vogue after the printing of this book!). Is the practice different than cis-men and women doing the same thing on their own social media outlets?

Taking photos is simply a form of chronicling one's life in a social diary format. It quickly shows us where we have been, the people we were with, and a reminder of the experiences we have had. I, personally, do not take many pictures of myself while out. I have wonderful friends that do that for me. Before I transform back into a pumpkin, I end up taking a few pics at the end of the night to immortalize my night out and to see how well my makeup held up through the evening's affairs.

Taking pictures of our feminine selves also serves to validate that we can actually pass as women. Looking back on a night to see our wide smiles serves as a reminder that we are tangible and *complete*. No one can take that away from us. Of course, we are just like teenage girls when we take pics. We sift and swipe through the gallery until we find the one or two photos that we are not horrified by to post (deleting the rest).

But why are there so many slutty pics?

SCANDALOUS

Well... ahem... some crossdressers are... how can I put this... working girls. There are some transsexuals and crossdressers who are in the risqué trade. They post videos and photos

in public social media galleries to gain a following. Then, once they reach a critical mass of followers, they direct them to other sites to see more risqué pics and videos so that they can make money. Some make money with paid subscribers and some make money through advertising clicks.

Much of what you may have come across is just a part of the larger sex industry. It is no different than any other segment – girl-on-girl, boy-on-girl, etc. – that draws in people who like that sort of thing. Pornography is a ten billion dollar (with a B) industry, and there is a market for all types of fetishes. Yes, when you venture into those types of salacious images and videos, you are now venturing into the fetish arena. I could say that these gurls and girls are just trying to find a way to make money (and I have heard that from one gurl who had started up her second pay-for-pic website), but they do serve a demographic that can reinforce what people tend to think all crossdressers are.

Let's think about that for a moment. Women have been portrayed as whores, sluts and nymphomaniacs in porn for years, and yet women walk around freely without being branded as such. Many men would like to think real women are like the ones in those videos but, in general, that line of thinking is wish fulfillment as opposed to stereotyping women in the real world.

Crossdressers face the same things, but in reverse. Since we are misunderstood, people feel validated when they see online proof that supports their general hypothesis. We see what we want to see, and discard all the proof that fails to support our assertions, regardless of how compelling that proof may be. Be sure to look at any Internet photo or video with an open mind, comparing them to how *the industry* presents other groups' seedy and scandalous sides. Typically, the more professional the image, the more professional the gurl (unless there is a portrait studio reference!)

COMPENSATION

Of course, not all posted pics are from the porn industry. We are all guilty of posing for those pics where we are bumping out our hips, thrusting out our chests, and running our hands through our hair, trying to look as sexy as we possibly can.

Yeah. Slutty!

The simplest explanation is usually the best. In an effort to strike as feminine a pose as possible, we over-compensate. We mimic what we understand femininity to be. And because we are trying so hard to undo our masculine attributes, we go big with the flair in order to fool the camera into believing that first, we are not ten pounds heavier than we are and, second, that we are not burly men failing at our female presentation.

The camera never lies, although we wish it would. It is a cruel mistress that always reflects back on us what we truly are – for good or ill.

Adept crossdressers understand how to minimize their frame and actions, using their bodies to mislead their masculine appearance. Some crossdressing men are slender of frame and pass easily, but others (like me) have to cheat. We add padding to our hips to re-proportion our frames in alignment with our broader shoulders and add a corset or waist

cincher to affect a more hourglass shape. We draw the elbows in to minimize our silhouette. We are looser with our fingers and wrists to extend our feminine flow.

It is always a tireless and tiring practice to pursue our optimal femininity. We continually remind ourselves of our progress through our photo chronology. And since most of us still see our male faces under the makeup, we are really never content with our results. We gush to other crossdressers about how pretty their dresses are, how great the shape and flow of their new wigs are, and how we love the shade of their new lipstick, but we can never see in ourselves what we automatically see in them. Maybe we have blinders to our own beauty because we validate only external sources of it.

Yes, we are just as guilty of that derailing line of thinking as everyone else. Maybe, that makes us just as human.

Probing Questions

Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable.

~ C. S. Lewis

Questions are never indiscreet, answers sometimes are.

~ Oscar Wilde

———

ASK ME ANYTHING!

As we start winding down this book, dear reader, I decided to have our contributing couples raise some questions that need to be answered by either the crossdresser or his partner. These are questions that should be thought through and considered.

There is no single truth or wrong answer.

Speak honestly and listen with intent.

Remember that as the respondent, sometimes, you need to take a moment to shovel deeper than you want to in order to dig out the truth.

Jen and I asked the couples we interviewed what questions they had on their minds now that the wife or girlfriend knew that her husband or boyfriend was a crossdresser. These are the raw responses as we received them, without filters or restraint. Some are thoughtful musings while others are based on frayed emotions and fear. We do not intend to answer these questions, as every individual will have a different response based on where they are in their journey.

THE QUESTIONS

1. *FOR HIM:* What is so confining about your male persona that you think dressing as a woman could change or alleviate?
2. *FOR HIM:* What word or words describe how you feel living as a man?
3. *FOR HIM:* Does dressing in private make you feel vulnerable or empowered?
4. *FOR HIM:* When you move on from a private setting to a public setting dressed as a woman, how does that change how you feel?
5. *FOR HIM:* What have you gained from coming out?
6. *FOR HIM:* What have you jeopardized by coming out?
7. *FOR HIM:* Why the secrecy with your partner when all these years she confided in you about her own mistakes and issues?
8. *FOR HIM:* Why not confide in your partner? You said you considered her your best friend.
9. *FOR HIM:* Why didn't you tell your partner the truth when she was young, liberal and carefree; as opposed to when she is worn out from life, disappointed, and afraid to make it on her own.
10. *FOR HIM:* Why do you think some male-to-female crossdressers are more attracted to and excited by other crossdressing men than they are to cis-women?

11. *FOR HIM:* Why do I have to continue to be the one to initiate conversation about your crossdressing?
12. FOR HIM: Why do I have to coax you to crossdress after you plead with me that you have a need to dress?
13. *FOR HIM AND HER:* What percentage of crossdressers do you think go on to transition?
14. *FOR HIM:* Why does a crossdresser's urge to dress wane from time to time? Is there a hormonal cause?
15. *FOR HIM:* What percentage of crossdressers do you think are still *in the closet*?
16. *FOR HIM:* Do men who identify themselves as strictly crossdressers feel they suffer from Gender Identity Dysphoria?
17. *FOR HIM:* Why do you take more pictures of yourself when you are dressed as a woman?
18. *FOR HIM:* Why can't you understand that I am willing to participate and be involved with your crossdressing?
19. *FOR HIM AND HER:* Should we involve other members of our family? Which friends should we tell and who needs to know?
20. *FOR HIM:* Do you dress for sexual release?
21. *FOR HIM:* Do you find that you feel more sensual or sexual when you are dressed?
22. *FOR HER:* Will you ever fully accept me as a partner with dual identities?
23. *FOR HER:* Could you ever become a defender of my crossdresser?

1.27. You Can't Handle The Truth

Truth is everybody is going to hurt you; you just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.

~ Bob Marley

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

~ Buddha

_____

CALL BACK

Remember earlier in the book where we talked about the toddler and the blanket that would calm him? Dear partner, does any of that now ring with more truth, or at least more feasibility, as it may relate to your crossdresser? In life, truth is what you make it.

And that is all I want from my crossdresser, Savannah. All I want is the truth.

And you deserve no less, dear partner.

Each person in a relationship should be treated as an equal. Truths need to be told, for they are the easiest to say. Yet, somehow speaking the truth is one of the most difficult things to do, especially after secrets have been locked away for a long time.

The bricks and poured concrete laying the foundation of the secret bunker are filled with misdirection, half-truths and omissions. Armed sentries of fear and shame stand post at every conceivable entrance and exit into that bunker. All the while, the keeper of the secret sits a mile underground in a ten-foot square gray-washed room sitting atop a chained and locked crate that hums like a bomb ready to detonate. It is an existence where the heart races, sweat pours down the brow, and the walls constantly pulse and close in to suffocate the last vapors of oxygen out of the lungs.

But the alternative, to release the secret into the world, seems like it would be akin to opening Pandora's box and setting loose its contained evils to the world. Better to stand guard as a martyr than to trust and believe in the good in our fellow man and woman. According to the Greek myth, when Pandora opened the lid and released the evils upon the world she closed it in time to keep one of the contents from escaping, Elpis – translated as hope (or expectation).

The secret of crossdressing, to many, is like releasing the evils upon the world, its wraithlike talons poised to destroy all in its mindless path. The crossdresser needs to understand when it comes to his partner, there is always hope. Knowing our partner and ourselves allows hope to guide the truth from the box to the light.

One thing was left in Pandora's Box after she was able to close its lid. What we still hold in our hearts against the evils of the world is that same thing – hope.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Are you familiar with the parable of the six blind men who were set to describe a pachyderm standing in front of them? One described its rough and round legs as tree trunks. Another ran his hands along pointed ivory and thought it to be a spear. A third grabbed at a

tail and considered it a rope. Yet another found the animal's trunk and recoiled with the assertion that he had come across a snake.

Each knew the truth, as he understood it. Their experience shaped how they could describe and reference something new to them. The same could be said about the partners of crossdressers. Many understand crossdressing in a very vague sense, quickly formulating an opinion after being told about their partner's proclivities. Their minds piece together what they know of gay men, celebrity cases of men transitioning into women and vice versa, and strange uncles who thought it would be a hoot to dress up in drag for Halloween.

A crossdressing partner's understanding is shaped by their exposure (or lack there of) to the alternative gender community. So, of course, questions will be asked that may sound harsh to us crossdressers. Are you gay? Do you want to be a woman? We may instantly take offense at such questions. How could they dare ask such things? Please understand that these questions are not asked out of spite, but in a pursuit of knowledge about a part of your life that was sheltered from them.

Partners have a right to ask any question. And you, dear crossdresser, have a responsibility to tell them the truth to the fullest extent of your own understanding. At that moment in time, if you don't know the answer, what do you do? Don't circle C like was suggested for when you took a multiple-choice pop quiz. Tell your partner, „I don't know", or whatever the truth is. Then explore for the answers.

Those blind men were really silly, weren't they? A snake and a tree trunk... what idiots, right? Nope! They qualified based on what they understood. It is our job, dear crossdressers, to help illuminate what it truly means to be who we are.

But I can't explain who I am, Savannah! I don't even understand why I do what I do.

Why not? You have been doing this crossdressing thing for either a little while or for a lifetime. Have you never reflected on the whys? Not the whys of the roots of attraction. That is a deeper question, like why does a gay man like men. There may be one answer or there may be a hundred answers... or there may be no answer to that question. But to analyze what we like about it, what comfort we find in it, and what pleasures we derive from it are all attainable answers if we decide to look for them. Living a life without understanding is a life without enlightenment.

Truth is also enlightenment and wisdom. The truth is only as true as our understanding. If asking the question, „Why do you go to church?" results in the answer, „Because my momma always took me...", then are we being honest with the reasons why we hold our religion so tightly? Our perception of truth is only as good as what we *can* see and what we *choose* to see.

Those blind men, had they brought their collected wisdom together, could have discovered a new truth and posed the answer of an elephant to those who were asking them to decipher the animal before them. That is also true with the truth. We may understand our own crossdressing and our partners may have their own notions of enlightenment on the subject of transgenderism, but have we looked outside ourselves to learn more about the community at large? Have we as crossdressers done any reading? Have we gotten together to

share our experiences with others like us? Have we taken in that information and reflected on how that knowledge fits into our own lives?

PURSUIT OF TRUTH

Continuing to use those blind men as our example, I asked whether they would have realized that the animal before them was an elephant had they brought their collected wisdom together in collaboration. But if they did, would that be the truth? Is the elephant really an elephant?

Of course it is, Savannah? What else would it be?

Well, true, it's an elephant because a bunch of zoologists way back in the day (Dane Cook says it was a Wednesday) decided that they knew best how to classify the animal. So that assumption takes us back to understanding how the world works through labels. We understand the world based on our knowledge and experience. Do we know all we need to know about men who crossdress? Have all crossdressing men willingly come forward to participate in an international census that would take all of our answers and crunch the numbers into a statistically significant and sound profile of who we are and why we do what we do?

Of course that output would only be accurate if the right questions were asked to begin with. Can someone (or a group of someones) ask the right questions to a crossdresser if they themselves have never had the urge to crossdress?

So have the crossdressers compose the questions.

That wouldn't work either, because most crossdressers only understand themselves (and even that understanding is not always complete).

So now what? I feel like we are going in circles.

We are going in circles, dear reader.

That is the point.

Are you confused? Are you wondering where to go from here?

Yes.

Good.

Learning begins with the act of asking questions. You have to be willing to truly hear the answers and process them into an understanding that is ever expanding. Answers should lead to more questions. There are no dead ends, only opportunities to fill in the gaps. We can't deny information because it runs contrary to our current beliefs.

Keep an open mind.

Ask pressing questions of your partner and really listen to the answers given.

Hold your partner to nothing less than the truth.

Reflect on why you hold to your beliefs.

Is an elephant only a truth if it is comprised of a sum of its parts? Is the animal only truth because it is the most commonly held and accepted belief as to what it is? Or are we constantly discovering new things about life that change the way we see things?

In the 4th century BCE, the Greeks believed with certainty that Earth was the center of the known universe. In the 16th century, Copernicus theorized that the sun was the center of the universe and that the Earth orbited around it. In the last century, entirely new galaxies have been discovered, increasing our understanding of an *expanding* universe and our place within it.

The Earth is held up on the shell of a giant turtle.

Not true.

The Earth is flat and sailing ships can fall off the edges into the abyss.

Didn't happen.

The moon is made of cheese.

A fairy tale.

Homosexuals are an evil abomination and need to be cured.

Religious dogma.

Crossdressers are all gay, dress as a fetish, and secretly want to be biological women.

Not all of us.

1.28. Reluctance

The bed is a bundle of paradoxes: we go to it with reluctance, yet we quit it with regret; we make up our minds every night to leave it early, but we wake up our bodies every morning to keep it late.

~ Ogden Nash

When I have reached a summit, I leave it with great reluctance, unless it is to reach for another, higher one.

~ Gustav Mahler

———

ACCURATE QUOTES

I hope you have enjoyed reading the quotes that have accompanied the chapters. I selected each of them in the hopes that they would resonate with the topics being discussed. I also chose them because, regardless of when they were written or spoken, they are poignant and relevant... and I tried my best to treat them with reverence.

These two quotes are especially heartfelt on a personal level as it comes to my experiences as Savannah. While difficult to understand our motivations as to why we dress in the first place, we do enjoy the act of dressing. I do not look too far or too deeply to uncover the reasons why I think the way I do. As long as I am not hurting others close to me or myself, the root causes seem less important than understanding and embracing me as a full person.

Changing between forms can be a difficult transition. That's the simplest statement I can make on it. The art of becoming my feminine self is a sometimes frustrating, often-painstaking endeavor, taking far too much time and effort to achieve a semblance of womanliness that I am satisfied with. Why can't it just be a snap of the fingers to get the vision of what's in my head onto my physical form? I know I said that the act of applying makeup and getting into all our feminine attire is a calming process – it is – but that process also serves as a reminder that we are not the women that we want to present as.

Sometimes we can't even be bothered to get up the motivation to dress. Some crossdressers I have talked to are happy to dress once every couple of months. It is not an incessant need for all of us all of the time. It doesn't consume every waking moment. It is something we like to do on occasion when the mood strikes us. In her interview, Debra stated that he wanted a loving relationship with his wife, with the ability to dress as Debra *when the mood struck*.

Conversely, for me, the act of unbecoming is also sometimes difficult. While most women can't wait to kick off their heels, rip off those pantyhose and get a hand unzipping and slipping off that dress, most crossdressers want their feminine experience to last as long as it can before having to return to everyday life. When I get home, I like to take those selfies that I didn't take while out experiencing life as Savannah. I like to take a physical inventory of how

I look, reflect for a moment on Savannah as a human being, assess what I could do better for next time, and say my silent goodbyes.

1.29. Is This Goodbye?

Could we see when and where we are to meet again, we would be more tender when we bid our friends goodbye.

~ Ouida

Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.

~ Mother Teresa

_____

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW

William Shakespeare may have said it best. Juliet uttered those words to her lover Romeo. She acknowledged the feelings that accompanied their reluctance to part ways for the evening, but also affirmed their longing for the next moments where they could share their hearts' love for each other in person.

Crossdressing is like that for some of us. We pour our hearts into our craft of feminine being, living those moments like they are our last, then suffer our sweet sorrow for the end of each feminine episode and our longing for the next time where we can feel so free and whole as a person again.

I pursue my love of the written word, provide positivity and hope for people around me, and devote my whole heart to my true love. I do these things as both a man and as Savannah (except writing, since it is somewhat difficult to type with French-manicured nails).

I long for a world where our masculinity and femininity are both celebrated as normal. I long for a world that doesn't judge us on currently established social constructs of what makes a man a man and a woman a woman. Maybe intolerance will become tolerance, and tolerance will become acceptance, as people learn more about what a crossdresser is and is not. Understanding of what our individual truth is may become an enlightenment of a new universal truth.

I hope I have helped you, dear reader. I may not have answered all or even a few of your questions. I hope, at the very least, I helped you to ask more questions of yourself and of your partner. The pursuit of knowledge comes at a price. That price should be gladly paid in order to come out the other side a stronger and more enlightened individual.

Don't be afraid of your truth.

Cast aside your assumptions.

Show honor to yourself and to your partner.

Just take that first step and show up.

With warmest regards and love,

Savannah Hauk

1.30. Resources & Bibliographies

Deloto, Barbara, Thomas Newgen. *An Addicted Cross-Dresser, Married and a Happy Ending – A True Story.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Boyd, Helen. *My Husband Betty: Love, Sex, and Life with a Crossdresser.* PM Publishers Inc, 2003.

Rudd, Peggy J. *My Husband Wears My Clothes.* Seal Press, 2003.

Erhardt, Virginia. *Head Over Heels: Wives Who Stay With Cross-Dressers and Transsexuals*. Routledge, 2006.

http://www.brainyquotes.com
http://www.livingwithcrossdressing.com
http://www.tgforum.com
http://www.tinybuddha.com
http://www.plannedparenthood.org
http://www.femmefever.com
http://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com
Fiala, Andrew. „Toleration.“, http://www.iep.utm.edu/tolerati

1.31. Transgendered Terms

These terms come from www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com. It is a wonderful resource for all things transgender. I strongly urge you to use it as a resource for relevant and up-to-date information.

agender – *adj.*: a person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless.

ally /„al-lie“/ – *noun*: a (typically straight and/or cisgender) person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ community. We consider people to be active allies who take action on in support and respect.

androgyny/ous /„an-jrah-jun-ee“; „an-jrah-jun-uss“/ – *adj.*: **1** a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity.

androsexual / androphilic – *adj.*: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some men, males, and/or masculinity.

aromantic – *adj.*: experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior.

asexual – adj.: experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior.

bigender – *adj.*: a person who fluctuates between traditionally „woman“ and „man“ gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender).

bicurious – *adj.*: a curiosity about having attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning).

biological sex – *noun*: a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male or intersex.

biphobia – *noun*: a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, invisibility, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have or express towards bisexual individuals.

bisexual – *adj.*: **1** a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. **2** a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of their gender and another gender.

butch – *noun & adj.*: a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally.

cisgender /„siss-jendur“/ – *adj.*: a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and assigned male at birth).

cissexism – *noun*: behavior that grants preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforces the idea that being cisgender is somehow better or more „right“ than being transgender, and/or makes other genders invisible.

cisnormativity – *noun*: the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to trans* identities or people.

closeted – *adj*.: an individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity.

clocking – *verb*.: term used to reflect that someone transgender has been recognized as trans, usually when that person is trying to blend in with cisgender people, and not intending to be seen as anything other than the gender they present.

cross-dresser – *noun*: someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

deadnaming – *verb*.: the practice of uttering or publishing the name that a trans person used prior to transition.

demiromantic – *adj.*: little or no capacity to experience romantic attraction until a strong sexual or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a sexual relationship.

demisexual – *adj*.: little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a romantic relationship.

doxxing – *verb.*: slang for „dropping documents“, a practice begun by hackers more than a decade ago. These hackers would collect and then reveal „personal and private information, including home addresses and national identity numbers.

drag king – *noun*: someone who performs masculinity theatrically.

drag queen – *noun*: someone who performs femininity theatrically.

dyke – *noun*: referring to a masculine presenting lesbian. While often used derogatorily, it can is adopted affirmatively by many lesbians (both more masculine and more feminine presenting lesbians not necessarily masculine ones) as a positive self-identity term.

fag(got) – *noun*: derogatory term referring to a gay person, or someone perceived as queer. Occasionally used as an self-identifying affirming term by some gay men, at times in the shortened form ‚fag‘.

feminine-of-center; masculine-of-center – *adj*.: a word that indicates a range of terms of gender identity and gender presentation for folks who present, understand themselves,

and/or relate to others in a more feminine/masculine way, but don't necessarily identify as women/men.

feminine-presenting; masculine-presenting – *adj.*: a way to describe someone who expresses gender in a more feminine/masculine way.

femme – *noun & adj.*: someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman.

fluid(ity) – *adj.*: generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight).

FtM / F2M; MtF / M2F – *abbreviation*: female-to-male transgender or transsexual person; male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

gay – *adj.*: individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender.

gender binary – *noun*: the idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two.

gender dysphoria – *noun*: the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex.

gender euphoria – *noun*: The opposite of gender dysphoria.
Of a cisgender person, it is a state of happiness about being male or female and having the associated gender roles and body parts.
Of a transgender person, it refers to feeling great about living as your desired gender.

gender expression – *noun*: the external display of one's gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally made sense of on scales of masculinity and femininity.

gender fluid– *adj.*: gender fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl.

gender identity – *noun*: the internal perception of an one's gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their options for gender to be.

gender non-conforming – *adj.*: **1** a gender expression descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender presentation (masculine woman or feminine man).

gender normative / gender straight – *adj.*: someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society's gender-based expectations.

genderqueer – *adj.*: a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).

gender variant – *adj.*: someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, gender-queer, cross-dresser, etc.).

gynesexual / gynephilic /„guy-nuh-seks-shu-uhl“/ – *adj.*: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some woman, females, and/or femininity.

heteronormativity – *noun*: the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual (e.g. asking a woman if she has a boyfriend) and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

hermaphrodite – *noun*: an outdated medical term previously used to refer to someone who was born with some combination of typically-male and typically-female sex characteristics.

heteronormativity – *noun*: the assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

heterosexism – *noun*: behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more „right“ than queerness, and/or makes other sexualities invisible.

heterosexual – *adj.*: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Also known as straight.

homophobia – *noun*: an umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of LGBTQ community.

homosexual – *adj. & noun*: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender.

intersex – *adj.*: term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female.

lesbian – *noun & adj.*: women who have the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to some other women.

LGBTQ; GSM; DSG – *abbreviations*: shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality, there are many different initialisms people prefer. LGBTQ is Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and/or Questioning (sometimes people at a + at the end in an effort to be more inclusive); GSM is Gender and Sexual Minorities; DSG is Diverse Sexualities and Genders. Other options include the initialism GLBT or LGBT and the

acronym QUILTBAG (Queer [or Questioning] Undecided Intersex Lesbian Trans* Bisexual Asexual [or Allied] and Gay [or Genderqueer]).

lipstick lesbian – *noun*: Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

metrosexual – *adj.*: a man with a strong aesthetic sense who spends more time, energy, or money on his appearance and grooming than is considered gender normative.

MSM / WSW – *abbreviations*: men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women, to distinguish sexual behaviors from sexual identities: because a man is straight, it doesn't mean he's not having sex with men.

Mx. /„mix" or „schwa"/ – an honorific (e.g. Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.) that is gender neutral.
outing – *verb*: involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

pansexual – *adj.*: a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to „pan".

passing – *adj. & verb*: **1** trans* people being accepted as, or able to „pass for", a member of their self-identified gender identity (regardless of sex assigned at birth) without being identified as trans*. **2** An LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

PGPs – *abbreviation*: preferred gender pronouns. Often used during introductions, becoming more common in educational institutions.

polyamory / polyamorous – *noun & adj.*: refers to the practice of, desire to, or orientation towards having ethically, honest, and consensual non-monogamous relationships (i.e. relationships that may include multiple partners).

queer – *adj.*: used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight. Also used to describe people who have a non-normative gender identity, or as a political affiliation.

questioning – *verb & adj.*: an individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

QPOC / QTPOC – *abbreviation*: initialisms that stand for queer people of color and queer and/or trans people of color.

same gender loving (SGL) – *adj.*: sometimes used by some members of the African-American or Black community to express an non-straight sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

sex assigned at birth (SAAB) – *abbreviation*: a phrase used to intentionally recognize a person's assigned sex (not gender identity). Sometimes called „designated sex at birth" (DSAB)

or „sex coercively assigned at birth“ (SCAB), or specifically used as „assigned male at birth“ (AMAB) or „assigned female at birth“.

sexual orientation – *noun*: the type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Often confused with sexual preference.

sexual preference – *noun*: the types of sexual intercourse, stimulation, and gratification one likes to receive and participate in. Generally when this term is used, it is being mistakenly interchanged with „sexual orientation“, creating an illusion that one has a choice (or „preference“) in who they are attracted to.

sex reassignment surgery (SRS) – *noun*: used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex.

skoliosexual – *adj.*: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some genderqueer, transgender, transsexual, and/or non-binary people.

spiritual attraction – *noun*: a capacity that evokes the want to engage in intimate behavior based on one's experience with, interpretation of, or belief in the supernatural (e.g., religious teachings, messages from a deity), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense).

stealth – *adj.*: a trans person who is not „out“ as trans, and is perceived by others as cisgender.

straight – *adj.*: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people who are not their same sex/gender. A more colloquial term for the word heterosexual.

stud – *noun*: most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as ‚butch' or ‚aggressive'.

TERF – *noun*: acronym for Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist, and is used to describe those radical feminists who oppose inclusion of transgender women in spaces they reserve exclusively for women assigned female at birth.

third gender – *noun*: for a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender.

top surgery – *noun*: this term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.

tranny chaser – *noun*: term describes a suitor, usually a man, whose sexual yearnings are to hook up with the object of his desire: a transsexual or transgender woman.

trans* – *adj.*: An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms.

transgender – *adj*.: A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that assigned at birth based on anatomical sex.

transition / transitioning – *noun & verb*: this term is primarily used to refer to the process a trans* person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

transman; transwoman – *noun* : An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transgender people or transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as assigned female sex at birth (sometimes referred to as transguy).

transphobia – *noun*: the fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans* people, the trans* community, or gender ambiguity.

transsexual – *noun & adj*.: a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth.

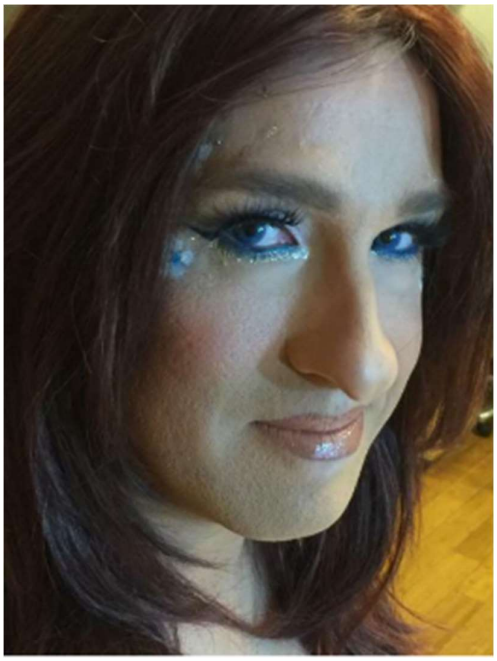
transvestite – *noun*: a person who dresses as the binary opposite gender expression („cross-dresses“) for any one of many reasons, including relaxation, fun, and sexual gratification (often called a „cross-dresser“, and should not be confused with transsexual).

triple T – *noun*: slang for „Trannier Than Thou“, an expression meant to criticize someone transgender who has either taken the position or exhibited behavior that indicates their transition was (or is) somehow better than another trans person's.

two-spirit – *noun*: is an umbrella term traditionally used by Native American people to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders.

ze / zir /„zee“, „zerr“ or „zeer“/ – alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some trans* people. They replace „he“ and „she“ and „his“ and „hers“ respectively.

1.32. About the Author



You know more about my life from reading this book than many people I interact with on a daily basis. Although I do live a dual life when it comes to colleagues, co-workers, and friends, I am an open book to the right people.

I hail from Detroit, Michigan, where the climate of acceptability in the 80s and 90s was less than stellar for crossdressers and other transgender folks. More than twenty years ago, I moved to the big city of Manhattan Island for work-related reasons and discovered a world (or a couple of boroughs) where alternative lifestyles were much more socially acceptable. Eventually, I moved out to Long Island where I have continued to live, work, love and explore both my masculinity and femininity.

I hope my journey is of value to all readers, both for the crossdresser in understanding themselves and for those partners, friends and families that need support to foster their acceptance of a person whose lifestyle may be foreign, misconstrued, and scary.

Live well, love well, and be the most beautiful creature you can be.

Read more at Savannah Hauk's site (https://livingwithcrossdressing.com/)

Book 2
Discovering Your True Identity

Living with Crossdressing
Discovering Your True Identity
Biology
Identity
Expression
Pronouns
Sexuality
Attraction
You
Savannah Hauk

Living with Crossdressing

Discovering Your True Identity

Written by Savannah Hauk

© Copyright 2019 by Savannah Hauk – All rights reserved.

_____

LivingWithCrossdressing.com

Follow on Facebook @livingwithcrossdressing

Follow on Instagram @savannahhauk

2.1.Dedication

If you believe in yourself and have dedication and pride - and never quit, you'll be a winner. The price of victory is high but so are the rewards.

~ Bear Bryant

We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.

~ Jesse Owens

WE ARE ONE PEOPLE. I believe we are better together than we are apart. That is not to say we need to be in close proximity, but that we are stronger when unified. Understanding the climate of the current world stage — I am not naïve enough to believe otherwise — it should not preclude us from opening our hearts and minds wide to other gender identities and alternative lifestyles. My hope is for all people to be accepting of all others, not just those aligned in thinking and perspective.

The world, when seen with open eyes, is brighter in color and richer in texture. I dedicate this book to everyone who hopes this brave, new world will not be fractured or defined by social conditioning, but, instead, will be filled with the love and understanding every person deserves.

2.2. Acknowledgements

I NEED TO GIVE THANKS to the people closest to me. They touch my heart. With every moment I breathe in, I have the capacity to take in new thoughts and exhale out my own ideas about the universe — and grow in my understanding of my place within it.

To my life partner Jen (Judy, in real life — she was too shy for the first book to be named). She continually grows in her acceptance of me as Savannah, both as separate masculine and feminine personas and as a single evolving entity. Of course, she voices her opinion about my hemlines or the tightness of my dresses. Her fears of family discovering Savannah by accident are diminishing (as one of her daughters now had been told). And, as always — when coupled with someone like me who is a searcher of knowledge — her inherent understanding of her own worldview and view of herself is challenged and ever-evolving.

I send my gratitude and admiration to my close confidants whom I rely on as my steadfast bedrocks — my sounding boards. The answers bouncing back range from initially confusing to utterly brilliant in their content. I apologize to them for the indeterminable time it sometimes takes me to coalesce the incoming strands of knowledge into my own outgoing — and on-going — ideas. Thank you to Lex, Victoria, Amanda, Elaine, Dawny, April and others provide such valuable input and never-ending friendship.

2.3. Good Housekeeping

PRONOUNS

Heated discussions rage around the concept of proper pronoun usage. Not so long ago, a viral video captured the sheer venomous reaction of a transwoman being mis-gendered. I don't wish to offend any individual by using the wrong masculine, feminine or gender-neutral pronouns to describe them. In this book, for ease of reading, I will be using the pronoun appropriate to the individual's presentation.

We are in a social climate where we still need to describe people with labels in order to let others understand them better. As the debates on gender identity, gender fluidity, and non-binary identification continues — and new gender qualifiers become more popular — I am sure my pronoun usage throughout this book will quickly become archaic and unusable. Please be as accepting of this effort as you hope people will be accepting of you, as this book is written in one moment in time where the prevailing societal norms continues to hold that a man is he and a woman is she... and that only those two specific genders exists.

LABELS

Crossdressers, transgender folks, and individuals with alternative romantic lifestyles in the LGBTQ+ community have many labels. I have spoken to a few transitioned MtF women who have different opinions as to whether crossdressers should be considered part of the transgender community, at all. In my writing, I take the position crossdressers are under the transgender umbrella (both in a binary and non-binary sense) in an effort to portray an inclusive and united community. I do not judge how anyone labels themselves, simply using established labels to bring us all together in a tighter bond of unity.

COMMUNITY

There are dozens of factions within the LGBTQ+ community. From ‚fetish' dressers to ‚everyday' crossdressers, from pre to post-operative transsexuals, from gays and lesbians to pan-sexuals, from binary to non-binary, a vast spectrum of gender identities and sexual preferences exist. I will focus on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, in general, and on crossdressing men, specifically. Just know I have love and positivity for all of my brothers and sisters in the community, and can only hope they can return that love and positivity to the rest of the world.

2.4. Am I Being Too Foreword?

AS I HAD PREVIOUSLY mentioned in my first book for crossdressing men and their cis-woman partners, *Living with Crossdressing: Defining a New Normal*, I do not possess a degree in psychology, sociology or other behavioral sciences. I have at my disposal, as a lay practitioner, my observations of individuals and groups within the LGBTQ+ community, and a lifetime of experience with my own crossdressing.

My credentials come from the School of Hard Knockers (see what I did there? Bad pun?), as it were. I have crossdressed since pre-adolescence and have faced my own trials of self-doubt, worries of the known, and fear of the unknown. I have endured personal shame, unhappiness and some loneliness; made to feel wrong as Savannah and viewed as *abnormal* by societal standards. Now, I have all but shed any shame for the man I am, for the woman I am... for the human being I am.

After my first book's release, I realized it had a gaping narrative hole in the middle of it. The book assumed the crossdressing men mentioned in the stories had understood their hearts well enough to reveal their feminine identities to their partner. Yes, this book includes chapters discussing what a crossdresser is, why they do it, and how to live as a normal (what is normal, by the way?) human being. But, the writing didn't delve deep enough in its focus of the crossdresser's development and understanding of their personas. I hope to remedy that in this second effort.

If you have read *Living with Crossdressing: Defining a New Normal*, you are sure to note that the sections ‚History of Crossdressing', ‚Savannah's Story' and others in the book will be familiar. While I have corrected and updated the sections where appropriate, you may experience a strange sensation of literary déjà vu. For new readers, I hope this effort brings a modicum of enlightenment — or, at least, provides a personal list of new questions to unravel.

My experiences and research as a crossdresser will only go so far. I know every crossdressing experience is unique, and to believe or boast that I have understood them all would be both braggadocios and absurd. Your story is yours. I can only tell a few tales of my own that you may find relevance and resonance to who you are... or are becoming.

With warmest regards and affection,

Savannah Hauk

2.5. Living on the Spectrum

The past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities.

~ Stephan Hawking

I've gone the full spectrum — from gospel to blues to jazz to soul to pop — and the public has accepted what I've done through it all. I think it means I've been doing something right at the right time.

~ Lou Rawls

LAND OF CROSSDRESSING CONFUSION

Walking on the unsteady tightrope of understanding your crossdressing identity can be tumultuous. Do you simply dress in order to achieve a heightened sense of pleasure? Do you allow your part-time feminine persona to flourish for a few hours before she is forced back under your masculinity? Are you experimenting with crossdressing as a method to normalize your thinking about your attraction to men? Is crossdressing an exploratory waystation on the journey to transitioning to your preferred gender? Or, are you content to blend somewhere between masculinity and femininity?

The above are a few examples for why a man may need to crossdress. While the crossdressing spectrum has many facets, its residence on the transgender spectrum is but a narrow sliver of the whole. But, who we are is comprised of so much more than a „need". All humans are driven by a unique combination of physiology, biology, personal identity, and attractions.

This chapter will provide insight on understanding some of the factors contributing to our gender and sexual identities — for crossdressers, for others in the transgender community, and for all people, in general. Understanding how we all live on the spectrum will provide you with a better understanding on where you are today and where you feel you should be as you walk on your life's path. There is an entire universe of truth around you, as well as definitive truths defining you alone.

READING THE LABELS

Crossdressers belong to a large umbrella representing the LGBTQ+ community. The acronym currently stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning[1] (plus, any other individual who feels they are Trans), describing a diverse group of people with sexual orientations and gender identities considered outside the social norms. Almost all the letters of the alphabet represent a specific sub-group inside the community.

A is for asexual. G can be used for gender queer instead of gay, and other designations such as gender creative or gender fluid. The Q can also stand for queer. I and P can stand for ‚inter-sexual' and ‚pan-sexual'. It seems, every year the letters of the alphabet end up representing emerging groups.

[1] https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq/

It took years for me to finally ride the coattails of the label of crossdresser. Originally — in 1996 — I took on the mantle of transvestite, a term coined by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910. It was always a more clinical term, especially since it comes from the Latin *trans*, meaning „across“ or „over“, and *vestitus*, meaning „dressed“ (Gross! Latin!). The term transvestite, or the slang tranny, had already been considered a dirty word during my childhood.

It wasn't until my mid-twenties that I spoke the word transvestite aloud as my descriptive label. I had to overcome self-doubt to accept the term — since it was so filled with stigma. It was a momentous day of acceptance for me and for my self-assignment to a larger community. Of course, I never really liked the word transvestite. Eventually, I gravitated to the softer moniker of crossdresser. Ironically, at that time, my acceptance of the term was still based on misunderstood and limited information.

IT'S NOT EUPHORIC

There are dozens of trans-specific terms I had not been familiar with until recently. Gender Dysphoria is the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as a male or female is opposite to their biological assignment. Another term, gender fluidity, relates to a person who does not identify as having a fixed or permanent gender. Pan-sexuals do not limit themselves or their sexual choices based on biology. More terms, phrases and labels continue to pop up all the time.

It is a daunting task to find and understand the labels that fit us. We may try on more than one title throughout our lives, hoping to find the one describing us best. That being said, is there not an inherent flaw to this line of thinking? Are not all of these labels wrought with their own shroud of limits, expectations and baggage? Some labels are mutually exclusive of each other, while others define a sexual preference versus a gender preference.

How am I supposed to navigate through all of the available information to see what group I belong in?

One of the bigger problems I see is the labels themselves. Why do we need a label at all? We seek out classifications because the human brain need a basic foundation of understanding, but we don't have to limit our lives to the tenets of those labels. We have the ability to transcend title shackles and become something more than the simple sum of our parts.

GENDER 101: AN INTRODUCTION

I understand my own life — or, at least, I understand how I currently perceive myself — but there is so much more outside of myself to explore. According to Trans Student Educational Resources[2] (TransStudent.org) and Genderbread.org[3], four or five individual gender and sexuality categories define us. All are key to the whole of who we are. Below is my interpretation of the information and contributions which I have dubbed the Combination of Life.

---

[2] https://www.transstudent.org/gender

[3] https://www.genderbread.org

GENDER BIOLOGY

Let's start with what would seem the most obvious category. Our physical gender is described as our gender assigned at birth. Other names include biological sex, anatomical sex, or physical sex. Unfortunately, the assignment of our birth ‚sex' is not always so simple.

The idea of male or female is a social construct devised by people to describe the human species (and other species). Ironically, we do not typically attribute the moniker of „man" or „woman" to other species. I may call my dog a „boy" or „girl", but that is just a term of affection or familiarity. The veterinarian charts will check off either „male" or „female". The inspection of a human infant's genitalia has historically been the most popular way of assigning its biological sex. Just remember, there are no absolutes as to how biological sex affects our representation of gender.

I grew up understanding „boy" and „girl". I had heard of a mixed-sex person called a „hermaphrodite". As an adult, I now better understood the biological concepts of male, female, and intersex (a combination of male and female biological characteristics making distinct gender assignment impossible[4]), learning that our biology is based on a variable combination of anatomy, hormones, genes or chromosomes. When we were teenagers in high school biology class, we were taught girls have XX sex chromosomes and boys have XY. That was all we needed to know — one X and one Y. But, while this scientific concept was simple and easily retained, the vast mosaic of how the human body is put together is a much more complex organic engine to decipher. Typically, males and females have forty-six chromosomes, including an XX or XY „sex" chromosome within it.

According to Wikipedia[5], „Humans, as well as some other organisms, can have a rare chromosomal arrangement that is contrary to their phenotypic sex..." This means that the arrangement of the chromosome is opposite than what is typically found. Males would be found to have an XX, instead of XY chromosomal arrangement. Wikipedia goes on to say, „Additionally, an abnormal number of sex chromosomes... may be present..." in which a person may have a single X or Y chromosome or more than just the expected single pair. A person may have XXX, XXY, XYY, XXYY, or more variations. Some even have more or less than forty-six chromosomes altogether!

Wait? I thought this was supposed to be the easiest of the types to understand? What the heck, Savannah? You're killing me, Smalls!

Well, I said it would be the easiest of the characteristics to be discussed, but I didn't say it would be easy! We live in a world where the definition of male or female is based on the size and shape of our genitalia. From the moment of the first clear sonograms to the routine slap on a baby's bottom for its first gulp of air, we are conditioned to wait for the phrase, „It's a boy!" or „It's a girl!". Heck, „gender reveal" parties are all the rage these days., aren't they?

As soon as the label of „boy" or „girl" is applied to an infant, an entire litany of binary gender expectations is also applied. Without labels or biological and gender-specific

---

[4] https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/gendergender-identity/whats-intersex

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XY_sex-determination_system

expectations, children might be freer to present themselves in a way more comfortable for their self-expression.

What about you, Savannah? How do you see yourself?

I am biologically a man, pure and simple. I cannot tell you if I have any strange genetic markers skewing my thinking away from my maleness. I cannot tell you for sure if all of the plastics, medications, or growth hormones and antibiotics in the processed foods my mother was exposed to during pregnancy altered my chromosomal profile. I love my manly bits and have no intention of having them removed. That being said, I have often stated that if I woke up tomorrow with a loss of body hair and a perky swelling on my chest area, my mind wouldn't be crushed by it. That last part is a fantasy... although aren't the masculine and feminine constructs we employ now just established and accepted fantasy? I would love to have the ability to shape-shift between the forms of male and female at will, since it would make my presentations so much easier for me. At the end of the day, though, I am happy in the body the universe has provided me... most of the time!

GENDER IDENTITY

Okay! Let's delve into a more nuanced and internalized gender category — identity. Gender identity is how people see themselves in terms of their masculinity or femininity. While we live in a society where the descriptors are male and female (and, in some cultures, an accepted third gender), those biological descriptions may not fit how we see ourselves.

We have grown up understanding a man is masculine and a woman is feminine. As with most statements in this book, the above statement is not an absolute in their application to an individual. We have known girls who were labeled tomboys and boys labeled as sissies. These are the two classic stereotypical examples that quickly refute the ideology that men always and exclusively exhibit masculine traits and women always represent feminine ones.

For Your Consideration ~

While reading the paragraph above, you probably never even paused at the word „tomboy" as a label for a woman, but did so with the word „sissies" as it applied to defining a man? If you didn't even think anything strange about the terms, I tip my wig to you. If those words still carry the power of negative connotation, then it is proof that words — as labels — continue to carry power.

Our internal sense of whether we feel male, female, or a mix-and-match of something in between is felt by all people. Cis-men (Cis-, or cisgender is a term for people whose gender identity matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth[6]) and cis-women naturally feel closer to the stereotypes representing their birth biology. Transgender people do not feel the typical pull of gender norms attached to their birth biology, instead drawn away to the opposite curve of the spectrum. The push/pull is not all or nothing, mind you, simply moving to a point along the axis between masculinity or femininity.

---

[6] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cisgender

For Your Consideration ~

Wikipedia[7] *describes the term cisgender as having its origin in the Latin-derived prefix cis-, meaning „on this side of", which is the opposite of trans-, meaning „across from" or „on the other side of".*

Savannah, can't you just give me a definite answer as to how I should put myself on the gender identity curve?

I wish I could.

There is no definitive or stable definition of gender identity once you walk away from the traditional binary tent poles of male-ness and female-ness. While a cis-individual's personal sense of self, most times, correlates to the social constructs of what is considered male or female, the rest of us do not conform to the norms that these „sexes" are defined as. The expectation of feeling masculine and feminine because of our assigned gender at birth just may not fit with how we see ourselves. Because of the accepted and „established" gender binary (to be discussed), we find ourselves needing to work outside of it to express what we feel is our own personal identity.

For me, Savannah is a manifestation and the identifiable presentation of my feminine identity. It was important to give her a voice and a name. At the very least, the moniker of Savannah is a convenience for when she is out in public. On the barometer of my level of masculinity versus femininity, the needle is still in the *red* of masculinity outside of Savannah's periodic appearances.

Whether red or pink, blue or yellow, Savannah sprang from a need to solidify something feminine inside me which I had recognized from an early age. Is it simply a waxing and waning spark I purposefully fanned more life into over the years? Am I misreading the feelings of my sensitivity and inherent femininity, forcing a female ideal onto it in order to keep it alive? Or, does recognizing and understanding my femininity bring me joy and a sense of completeness?

I believe it is the latter.

For Your Consideration~

Did you know, years ago, pink was the appropriate color for boys because it is a derivative of red (which was/is considered a very masculine color).

GENDER EXPRESSION

Ok. We all better understand the nuances of our physical anatomy now, and can appreciate how biology and our gender identity may not correspond with each other, right? Whether our sense of masculinity or femininity is contrary to the physical tropes and stereotypes of how males and females are perceived, we still need to show ourselves to the world in some way. To support our preferred presentation, we can don all manner and mix of masculine or feminine garb and accessories in our daily expression.

Normal folk (cis-individuals) can sometimes get defensive when interacting with individuals presenting themselves as an amalgam outside the gender binary (predominately

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cisgender

male or female attributes). These people skirt the social conventions in favor of their own non-binary gender aesthetic. From transmasculine women to genderqueer men, countless flavors exist between the typical and vanilla masculine and feminine presentations we have grown up with.

Countless types? Where do we even start?

Fashion is as good place to start as any. As I type this sentence at my local Starbucks, I am wearing denim jeans, a women's front-pouched, thumb-holed hoodie, and a purple umbra scarf borrowed from my girlfriend. I am nowhere near full Savannah mode, but I am wearing enough feminine clothing to warrant a second puzzled look. Nobody has stared, snickered, or pointed at me while whispering behind cupped hands. As a matter of fact, I usually get compliments when wearing my girlfriend's more colorful scarves. Hence, here we have the delicacy of clothing and fashion. Plenty of androgynous styles of clothing made for women can be worn in public by men without notice. I have a friend, Jennifer, who loves to wear sweaters, pants, and shoes in her medical office while presenting as a man in all other ways.

Side note: While writing this second book, I am in the Upstate of South Carolina, not the boroughs of New York City.

Now, of course, clothing can appear either unisex or be overtly (and stereotypically) masculine or feminine. But, once we get past the torrid and hot topic of fashion, we have to move on to other ways to present the manifestation of our gender identities. We can style our hair in a longer feminine cut to be worn in a ponytail (as I do when dressed in my male-mode) or in a severe buzzed cut to exude a more masculine motif.

For me, when it's time to become Savannah for an evening, the breastforms and hip pads come out. The pantyhose and waist cincher are hooked into place so a more feminine hourglass silhouette can be achieved (to spite my masculine shoulders). Then comes the makeup and wig, the dress, heels, and purse.

I am now Savannah — in all of her feminine glory!

The wig, makeup and padding are temporary, but necessary, measures to achieve my expression of femininity for a few hours at a time. But, let it be known I am also content to present in male-mode for the majority of the day. Ironically, my male expression includes those androgynous scarfs from my girlfriend, plus women's undies on a 24/7 basis. These are the things I do in order to fulfill the expression of my dual gender identity — publicly and privately.

For some transgender individuals, however, the temporary measures — while fulfilling for a time — do not allow them to maintain their sense of their preferred gender. For them, the more permanent solutions of surgical augmentation or reconstruction, hormone therapy and replacement, or sexual reassignment surgery may be warranted. Of course, therapy is very important to the processing of self-discovery and decision-making, since many factors concerning these more-permanent changes may not be truly understood.

For Your Consideration~

The harsh reality is, while you may enhance yourself physically in order to express your true gender identity and presentation, you may risk other social components you had enjoyed while in your original incarnation. A person may make serious sacrifices in order to live as their true authentic self. Proceed with open eyes and preparation.

The standard to how we present or express ourselves to the world is still based on the socially accepted concepts of male and female. While education about alternative gender expressions is more assessable, most male crossdressers' outward expressions are still predominantly defined as feminine. Whether it's a pair of panties worn under our work clothes or a complete head-to-toe transformation that helps us to complete our feeling of womanliness, we tend to choose a feminine expression in line with socially accepted norms.

SEXUAL ATTRACTION

Did someone say sex? Are you sure? I could have sworn I heard someone mention it. Huh. Well, since we already have it on our minds... the popular myth is men think about it every seven seconds. Of course, this is a claim wholly unsubstantiated, by the way.

Goofy anecdotes aside, many assume that our sexual attraction is tied to our gender identity and biology. Men love women. Women love men. It is an inherent concept imperative to the continuation of the human species. A round peg goes into a... never mind... and somehow, nine months later, a tiny person is produced. Hurray! Congratulations! Primitive instincts insist we procreate for the sake of humanity — heard by most of us, at least. But, let's talk specifically about sexual attraction from a different point of view.

I made a rookie mistake as a „coming out" transvestite (ugh, I have always hated that term) in the mid-90s. Once I declared my label as a man who likes to dress in more feminine attire, I suddenly assumed I should be attracted to men in a sexual way. According to the social norms and the misinformation I believed, it was understood that to be a male crossdresser was to also be gay. So, because I had openly expressed and accepted my crossdressing label, I opened myself up to the „inevitable" fact that I must be gay, as well. Plus, the fact that I suddenly found myself at events where I was attracted to beautiful drag queens and passable male-to-female crossdressers did not do me any favors in understanding my suddenly-confused sexuality. I knew they were men! I should not be attracted to them!

I figured when I was in male-mode, it was appropriate to be attracted to women and, as Savannah, it was appropriate (and expected) for me to be attracted to men. „But, you don't like men!" my brain cried out. I was utterly confused! I fell into the trap of believing my gender expression defined sexual attraction. It is a symbolic tar pit many of us get mired in, and is still prevalent thinking today.

We are attracted to who we are attracted to. It is that simple. I know... I know... life is not that simple — and people are not that accepting — when it comes to a person's sexual attraction outside the gender binary. Social constructs have always set the natural law[8] (a philosophy asserting that certain rights are inherent by virtue of human nature, endowed by

[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_law

nature — traditionally by God or a transcendent source — and that these can be understood universally through human reason) and accepted expectation of sexual attraction. You have to look inward at who you are to better understand who you are truly attracted to.

Are you ready for that examination? While the idea of sexual attraction seems simple — like with everything — subtle nuances and flavors to it.

- People considered heterosexual are attracted to members of the opposite sex.
- Gays and lesbians in the LGTBQ+ community are attracted to members of their own sex.
- Bisexuals are attracted to members of either sex, although they may show a preference to one or the other.
- Pansexuals look at the spirit of the individual they are attracted to, not giving the genitals of their partners too much consideration (whether male, female, intersex, trans, etc.).
- Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction; they have little or no desire to engage in sexual activity.

According to an online post by www.soc.ucsb.edu[9], sexuality can be defined by a person's biological sex and the object of their attraction. Basically, a person is either heterosexual or homosexual. The same article goes on to also describe sexual attraction as being androphilic (attracted to men or masculinity) versus gynephilic (attracted to women or femininity). These labels take the person's sex out of the equation and place their „object of attraction" on the identity or presentation. Lastly, the article mentions that people can be monosexual — attracted to one specific sex — or plurisexual — attracted to multiple sexes.

For me, dear reader, I realized my initial understanding of self was correct. I like women... a lot! But, I was faced with the quandary of questioning my attraction to crossdressers, drag queens, and other transsexual women. Crossdressers and drag queens are still men underneath the feminine finery. Transsexual women were previously men. And, I just said I didn't like men!

After a long while, I realized I wasn't attracted to crossdressers because they were men in dresses, but because they were successfully presenting themselves as women. Suddenly, it made complete sense. I had been attracted to women and femininity this whole time!

This part of the story, dear reader, is where sexual attraction leads directly into the next category we need to discuss... romantic or emotional attraction.

ROMANTIC/EMOTIONAL ATTRACTION

What's the difference between sexual attraction and romantic attraction, Savannah? Aren't they the same thing?

I think it can be summed up simply with the following analogy.

A woman's laugh carries across the crowded dance floor. Even with the strobing lights timed to the techno house music's beat, you quickly find her. She is wearing a tight body

[9] http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/article/overview-sexual-orientations

con LBD with beautiful strappy heels. Her legs seem to go on forever, just as her flowing and wavy blond hair seems to do the same. She has delicate, but deliberate, facial features, beautifully enhanced with the perfect amount of makeup. You think she would look perfect without any makeup. You also think she would look great in your bed with the morning sun's rays cascading onto her bare back.

That, my dear reader, is sexual attraction. What do you know about her, other than that you consider her beautiful and sensual? The hormones and pheromones in your brain have hijacked your reasoning. That's why men are said to have both a big brain and a little brain, isn't it? If you aren't interested in delving into your partner's hopes and dreams beyond what it takes to get her out of her dress and between the sheets, the odds are your sexual attraction will never evolve into a romantic attraction.

Romantic attractions may or may not have a sexual component. Friends who have known each other for years — who know every intimate detail of the other's life — can become deeply tied together in a completely platonic way. The physicality of intimacy and intercourse need not be part of the equation. Have you ever wanted to ask a close friend out on a date, only to be rebuffed by the reply of, „I want to, but I don't want to ruin our friendship"?

A delicate balance exists between what people consider sexual attraction and romantic attraction. Without a deep understanding of what drives your preferences, it can be very easy to mix up the two. Are you attracted to another crossdressing man (when dressed in feminine garb) because of a shared kinship? Will you seek the attention of a male admirer in order to feel „loved" as a woman, even if for a few hours? It is important to understand what you are looking for and why... all the while keeping yourself out of harm's way while doing it.

I periodically come across the following Facebook meme. It shows the portrait of a beautiful woman with the words, "Would you date a transsexual?". It always gives me pause and raises questions. Would I date her? Well, she is beautiful, so why not? Would I have a long-term relationship with her? I simply don't know. Nobody can discern what she is like in real life from a single photo.

For Your Consideration ~

Jen has been telling me she is embracing a new methodology for understanding and viewing people. She says, „The body is merely a vessel of the spirit." I agree with her, wholeheartedly. To answer the question from the meme above, I created a scenario of a woman I had been dating for a year. After that year, she told me she used to be a man. Would I stop dating her because of this new fact? If all I knew of her to that point was she was a woman in every way — and I was attracted to who she was — why would the fact of her being a post-op male-to-female person mean anything to change my feelings?

A person is so much more than just the public illusion of glamour they painstakingly create for the world to see. Taking the opposite tact, would someone want to love me romantically if they met and danced with me in a club as Savannah, only to then met me for

coffee a week later when I presented myself in male-mode? Would they have mistaken their romantic attraction for Savannah as simply the sexual attraction it actually was? Would they want to get to know the whole person I am?

My girlfriend and I were attracted to each other in our cis-personas. We developed a deepening friendship and got to know each other, using our mutual infatuation to fuel our romantic connection. When we were about to „turn the corner" with our relationship into more intimate territory, I confessed that Savannah existed. While the crossdressing revelation temporarily braked the development of our relationship (see the chapter, *Savannah's Story*), we both realized we wanted more with each other than just carnal relations. That moment of understanding evolved the hopes of a romantic relationship to the reality of one.

For Your Consideration ~

I must also point out a car accident I was involved in a month or two after the Savannah reveal further cemented Jen and my realization that we wanted to be in each other's lives on a long-term basis.

GENDER PRONOUNS

Wait? Where did this sixth category come from? Savannah, you only mentioned five categories in your introduction!

And you, dear reader, would be absolutely correct. One of the things defining us as a person is how we prefer to be addressed in conversation. While it might seem obvious that gender pronouns link to our gender presentation and identity, I realized gender pronouns stand on their own.

My good friend, Lex, is a transmasculine non-binary person who prefers the gender-neutral pronouns *they* and *them*. While I see Lex in a more male-centric presentation and know Lex was biologically born a female, I continue to struggle with the use of the neutral pronouns when addressing Lex as them. Many people who identify as genderqueer or other forms of gender non-binary (those who do not identify as male or female) have shifted to using they/them instead of he/him or she/her. Others have created new pronouns such as „zie", „sie", „ey", „ve", „tey", and „e" — and more — as a replacement pronoun in an effort to affect a neutral or agender identity[10][11].

I am happy with male pronouns when I am in male mode and with female pronouns when I am Savannah, simply preferring to be addressed with the pronoun coinciding with my presentation. Growing up, I never felt a pang of insecurity by being addressed with boy pronouns. As an adult, I still won't be offended if, as Savannah, a waitress asks, „Do you guys want appetizers?" or if, as my male self, the same waitress calls me „hun".

As you can see, I am not an expert on personal pronouns beyond the established and obvious masculine and feminine ones, and I have admitted to the above concerning my friend Lex. I will leave much of the still-emerging information in your hands to discover — legal issues,

[10] https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/
[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_neutrality

political opinions, contrasting worldviews, and much more to understand. I am just happy to be in the presence of those who can give me their personal perspective on the subject.

THE COMBINATION OF LIFE

Understanding who you are, in the grand scheme of things, is an almost impossible task if you are not prepared to take a long, deep look inside. The Gender Unicorn[12], the Genderbread Person[13], and other graphics allow us to look at the spectrums of biology, gender identity, gender expression, sexual attraction, romantic attraction, and gender pronouns in a way we may not have previously considered. I see each of the above categories as six tumblers in a combination lock that reveals who we are. My idea is not as cute as either the delicious Genderbread Person or the huggable Gender Unicorn, but the Combination of Life seems to keep things in a continuous loop.

Imagine, if you will, a set of six tumblers on a massive Combination of Life representing your personal identity. These tumblers do not take into account your career, your family, your experiences, or your station in life. Instead, each represents one of the concepts of self I mentioned in the previous paragraph. Turn each of the tumblers to the value you see in yourself. For instance, the Biology tumbler can be set to Male, Female, Intersex, etc. Your Gender Identity tumbler can be set to Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, etc. You set all six tumblers. Suddenly, your Combination of Life will open to reveal how you see yourself at this exact moment.

So... I spun the tumblers of your so-called Combination of Life. I still have no idea what it means!

These self-affirming concepts allow you to better understand your whole self. What they are not meant to do is combine together to create an all-encompassing super label summing up who you are. Life is not like the Megazords on the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers shows, dear readers. You are not a lump sum of your labels, self-imposed or otherwise. We are all very complex people.

Once you have better clarity of who you are in this moment, you will have a better sense of empowerment. It does not mean you will not change some of those wheels as you learn more about yourself. The tumblers of the Combination of Life (trademark pending, lol) are simply a tool to help you answer questions and discover more about you at this moment in your journey. The better the relationship you have with yourself, the healthier and more successful a relationship you can have with others.

AIN'T NO STOPPIN' US NOW!

You've got the look!

Understanding yourself allows you to build a more solid foundation. It takes confidence to defend yourself from others who may seek to tear you down for who you are. With a

[12] http://www.transstudent.org/gender/
[13] https://www.genderbread.org

knowledge of where you are on your life's journey, you can more easily take on any vocal opposition. You become your own advocate... your own voice... your own defender.

How better to assimilate into society than to be your true self — your shoulders back, chest out, and head held high. How you carry yourself speaks visual volumes as you walk through life. A measure of self-confidence is great to foster positive experiences, as well as essential for defusing more mundane public scrutiny before you are even aware of it.

It is possible to blend into society if you choose to. You may need to start out slow and in designated TG-friendly venues. Eventually, you will find yourself at the mall shopping for some pretty things or stopping at your local coffee shop for a pastry and Frappuccino. Living a secret life is not the same as living a full life, whether you are hiding from the public or from yourself. It may seem fulfilling enough to exist in your own sphere of influence, but that doesn't mean you should live a life barely out of the closet. I will admit I keep my dual identities separate and Savannah's identity fairly secretive, but both have a life outside of the home. My male side goes to work and lives a normal suburban life. When the mood strikes me or an event is planned, Savannah is happy to emerge from the same garage in the same car to visit friends, enjoy a dinner and dancing out, or to do some advocacy work. Crossdressing is typically not a 24/7 experience for me. If it were, my label of crossdresser might no longer apply.

PERSONAL STATISTICS

Now that you are well versed in all aspects of the gender and sexuality spectrum, understanding yourself should be a snap, right? Of course not! If life was so easy to figure out, we would never struggle. The settings of the tumblers are only a snapshot of where you are at this exact moment.

For me, I see myself as the following:

Biology: Male

Gender Identity: Dual Gender

(masculine orientation with feminine cusp)

Gender Expression: Masculine or Feminine

Sexual Attraction: Feminine

Romantic Attraction: Feminine

Gender Pronoun: „He/Him" („She/Her" as Savannah)

The settings above make up my unique and personal „combination of life". I see myself distinctly as a male-to-female crossdresser, happy to go through everyday life with a masculine presentation (with wisps of femininity thrown in on a daily basis). Once or twice a week, I unleash Savannah onto an unsuspecting world.

I am in balance.

I have a current understanding of *Me*.

I see myself as what you might label a male-to-female transvestite or crossdresser. I am not driven by an obsession to flaunt myself as a woman (although I am sure others would disagree for the simple fact that I want to dress as a woman in the first place). I do not strictly

dress for bedroom recreation and satisfaction. I go about life in a predominantly masculine form, while letting my feminine persona out five or six times a month.

Each of us has our own ongoing story. As we go through life, our tumblers can move by degrees in any direction. The dials are not meant to remain static. My experiences up to now have allowed me to better understand myself as a dual gender individual. The road is still wide open in front of me to learn more. Sometimes, we have to look back to the past to more clearly see the future. The next few chapters will focus on helping you to better understand crossdressing history and its cultural relevance.

2.6. History of Crossdressing

We are not makers of history. We are made by history.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.

~ Thomas Jefferson

HISTORY LESSON

Men have been dressing up as women for centuries. The art form is certainly not a modern concept only developed and gaining exposure to perpetrate the downfall of religious faith, as many in the media have tried to attributed to it.

Examples of it exist in many societies and cultures. Greek, Roman, Norse, and other mythologies, have stories of their gods masquerading as women, or mortal men being transformed into females. The gods were known to come down from the heavens and take the guise of the opposite sex for the whim of interacting with us mere humans. Many historical documents reference the concept of crossdressing, whether male-to-female or female-to-male. The Bible, for instance, in Deuteronomy 22:5, includes the following passage:

> *„A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."*

As to its true original intent, theologians can continue their debates on the matter. We cannot know the meaning of every passage in its original form, only having our current experience and social climate to draw conclusions from. Reading it today... apparently, I'm an abomination! I should stop writing and start repenting!

Actually, I will not be repenting. But, it is not my place to preach to you about whether the act of crossdressing is sinful. Your upbringing, experiences, and religious indoctrinations will have more influence on how you feel about it. I am simply illustrating that even the writers of the Bible (or translators and rewriters of it) felt a need to speak of it. Some believe the aforementioned passage speaks directly to the act of crossdressing. Other scholars and clergy believe it simply refers to the donning of clothes of the opposite gender as a deceit and falsehood when used for unlawful gain.

Throughout history, it was more common to see a woman take the guise of a man[14]. In the last several hundred years, the social station of women in many cultures was that of secondary citizens. What better way to gain respect, popularity for your ideas, and acceptance in society than by taking on the persona of the men you were trying to impress? And, it wasn't just ideas women were fighting for. Many women had served in various men-centric armies around the world, including decorated Catalina de Erauso, Ann Mills and Dorothy Lawrence. They were bold and seemingly fearless, as their military records had illustrated.

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_cross-dressing

At the same time, men who dressed as women were perceived as deceitful and as lowering their station. Charles Edward Stuart, in 1745, supposedly dressed as Flora MacDonald's maidservant to escape having to serve at the Battle of Culloden. Peking Opera singer Shi Pei Pu dressed as a woman to elicit information from a French diplomat during the Cultural Revolution. Even Jefferson Davis of the Confederate States of America was rumored to have dressed as a woman to escape the pursuing armies of the Union.

For Your Consideration ~

So, a woman dressed as a man was to be applauded. They masqueraded in a masculine form in order to elevate or gain stature or influence. On the other hand, a man dressed as a woman was to be demeaned, as if they had done so under the guise of fraud and deceit. It begs the question as to why a man would purposely negate their inherent gender and patriarchal superiority?

Ironically, within the last couple hundred years, it has become known that specific cultures revered those who considered themselves outside the gender binary. In the Native American Indian culture, the communal concept of Two-Spirit[15] was one where certain tribe members fulfilled traditional third-genders for ceremonial purposes. In modern day Thailand, Kathoey[16] (popularly labeled as Ladyboys) are effeminate men or transgender women assigned to a third gender.

Interesting.

I know! Right?

In the modern era, women wearing masculine attire hold no taboo. Women who simply prefer to wear jeans instead of skirts and dresses could all be considered female-to-male crossdressers based on strict gender (and Scripture) descriptions — but the practice has become accepted as normal. Why is that?

For Your Consideration ~

Is there a label for women who wear jeans? No? Why is a label necessary when a man does something considered more feminine, but not for a woman for doing something more masculine?

ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?

Throughout the ages, people have witnessed crossdressing as normal in the entertainment industry. In the Far East (Kabuki) and Europe (Shakespearean), theatergoers accepted the portrayal of female characters by men. Some of this was due to the culture of the era and the normalized segregation of the genders, but it illustrates that men were accepted in female character roles when for entertainment purposes.

This idea continues in modern times. Milton Berle, Flip Wilson, and Benny Hill made comedic careers out of parading around their stages as female characters. Jack Lemmon and

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-spirit
[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathoey

Tony Curtis used their feminine wiles in *Some Like It Hot* in order to hide from the mob, all the while getting into hilarious gender-bending misadventures with Marilyn Monroe. That film was popular in 1959.

Were these actors considered crossdressers? No. As far as we know, these performers did not take the art of crossdressing further than the hot stage spotlights or the silver screen for their audiences. They entertained us for laughs. Parody, not personal expression, drove these male-to-female characters.

As an audience, we can appreciate the performance of the character and the context of the story. From Danny Boyle to Dustin Hoffman, from Patrick Swayze to Tom Hanks, none were ever saddled with the stigma of being a transgender woman or crossdressing male. Even conservative-leaning Rudy Guiliani dressed as a woman for a cameo in a Broadway role. Cast that character out in real life and people would not necessarily be as happy or as entertained. Sitcoms last twenty-two minutes, movies last two hours. Real life is forever.

TWO TRAINS LEAVE THE STATION AT...

That wasn't a very good history lesson, Savannah.

Maybe, but my intent was not to bore you with too many statistics, dates, and personal profiles. No one ever memorizes those things (unless you have 3" x 5" index cards and are cramming for a midterm quiz). I simply wanted to give you a taste of the long history of people wearing the clothes considered appropriate of the opposite gender. Sometimes it helps to give yourself a broader perspective of something you are a part of.

Women have *masqueraded* as men in order to affect change or pursue grander social status. They were exulted for their courage and valor. Men of high stature, from the 1400s to the late 1800s, were dressed in the fineries of satins, silks and powdered wigs. Those aristocrats were looked up to and envied for their wealth and station. Why were they not considered crossdressers? Heck, even Greek and Roman men and women both wore robes, and it wasn't even for a college toga party.

In all cultures, males and females dress to impress and to show off their attributes. It's all about defining what will enhance the attraction of another. As our society has matured and become more accepting of the blurring of fashion lines, it is commonplace for women, in western culture, to be accepted wearing masculine fashions. Men can take more meticulous care of their bodies (being accepted in some more suburban and metropolitan areas). It is, unfortunately, the male crossdresser who continues to suffer in his quest for a more feminine expression.

The history lesson is over, dear reader. Continue this journey with me and let's see if, together, we can discover more about what motivates us in our pursuit for the perfect feminine presentation.

2.7. You Might be a Crossdresser if...

I believe that we are here for each other, not against each other. Everything comes from an understanding that you are a gift in my life - whoever you are, whatever our differences.

~ John Denver

If you own a home with wheels on it and several cars without, you just might be a redneck.

~ Jeff Foxworthy

SPECTRUM

The word „spectrum“ has been popularized in recent years as a way to describe a person afflicted with a mental or social disorder. If only people with special characteristics exist „on the spectrum“, doesn't it exclude the fact that all humans should exist on it? Wouldn't a normal person need to be on the spectrum in order to set a supposed standard? Being on a spectrum shouldn't be considered an abnormality, in and of itself. The rainbow is also a spectrum, comprised of the colors of visible light passing through a prism. Maybe that is why so many LGBTQ+ organizations use the colors as part of their banners or logos.

For Your Consideration ~

Biological sex could be illustrated as being a spectrum line, with males on the far-left and females on the far-right endpoints. Intersex individuals — having genitalia of both male and female — would be placed somewhere in the middle. The above would comprise three points on the line, with plenty of room in-between for everyone else.

For example, I know a crossdressing man who had developed excessive breast tissue during his early teenage years. He suffered from gynecomastia and eventually had the breast tissue removed. Now, as he better understands his gender preferences, he wishes he would have kept his original body as it was, especially now that he is considering transitioning to female to some degree. Where would he have landed on a spectrum that can't even be defined in a one-or-the-other way?

We talked about the gender alternative, sexual expression, and the non-binary spectrums. Hopefully, you thought about how you see yourself on them. If you happened to find yourself with a gender presentation or identity skewed from your birth biology, you might be a crossdresser... or gender queer... or gender fluid... or a transman or transwoman (or trans-masculine or trans-feminine). There are many ways for you to describe how you see yourself.

Along the transgender spectrum is a section for gender fluidity (or duality), and within that slice are crossdressers of all types. For the non-fetish crossdresser, our femininity is not only about dressing up as a woman for an evening on the town. It also involves the need to express our inherent alternative persona in some manner. We are not simply a fetish or hobbyist group. Having a duel gender is as real as a person who was born male, yet needs to transition to female in order to feel comfortable, and in line, with their feminine gender.

If you see yourself in the crossdressing section of the transgender spectrum — or, even if you are still unsure of what is classified as crossdressing — what follows is a by-no-means

complete list of crossdressing stereotypes[17]. They are stereotypes only in name, each describing a specific cross-section of motivation and purpose. Many crossdressers may have occupied more than one category during their lives. Some of the types I can personally vouch for... because I have lived them. Some of the other crossdressing „types“ out there I am still unfamiliar with. My job is to set the table for you and let you pick at what you would like to consume.

AVID READERS

I felt faint.

My freshly shaved skin tingled with the thought of wearing the lingerie my wife had placed on the bed for me. The bra, panties, garters and stockings would look fantastic on any woman's figure...

Many of us love to escape to make-believe worlds of femme fantasy fiction. To support this need, many fan sites exist dedicated to stories of fictional feminization. They cover all types of fetish writing topics, including forced feminization, „caught with consequences“, „bad boy to good girl“, mind control, and more. In fact, some writers are so prolific they have created an entire fictional universe filled with numerous stories of fate, lust, and all things male-turned-feminine.

The stories can range from sweet rated-G tales to sexually graphic XXX prose. From TGstories.com to Literotica.com to Fictionmania.tv, the Internet is a hotbed for those who want to immerse themselves in the worlds of femme fiction. I read somewhere on Facebook that just one of these sites had claimed to have over one million subscribers!

Some sites are dedicated to graphic novelization and the comic book format. Amateur animations and more mainstream hentai (a subgenre of Japanese manga and animation featuring overtly sexualized characters, sexually explicit images and plots) is very popular. Eastern cultures celebrate transgender identities, transitioning persons, and female cartoon characters with a little something extra much more than Western cultures. A quick search on Amazon will provide proof of hundreds of entries for crossdressing erotica.

For Your Consideration ~

For those struggling with gender identities or the reasons why to wear women's clothing — or for your girlfriend or wife who is on a desperate search for enlightenment about you — a quick search for the word „crossdressing“ can quickly reinforce the preconceived notions that crossdressing is nothing more than a fetish.

Femme fantasy fiction allows us to escape to worlds where we don't take personal responsibility for our feminine needs. It's a place to be engrossed in a reality where we can magically become a woman without the worry of judgement or permanence.

Isn't it pornography?

Some of it is, of course. Our minds and bodies react to it. Isn't that the entire point of erotica? We are drawn to and excited by certain taboo subject matter. The creation of such

[17] https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-different-varieties-of-cross-dressing

content is a billion-dollar-a-year industry, not just catering to or focused on crossdressers. Millions of people have a kink they like to explore. There should be no shame in enjoying it. Pornography becomes unhealthy when you start believing its fantasy worlds are what real life should be. Erotica, pornography, and literature have their place — relegated to fantasy.

FORCED FEMINIZATION

Forced feminization is true to its namesake. This act allows crossdressing men to be absolved from the responsibility of acknowledging their feminine desires. If they are *forced* to do it, it's the dominant partner's responsibility for the crossdresser's predicament. The crossdresser is then *off* the hook, able to maintain their masculinity with the notion their feminization was beyond their control.

Websites dedicated to themes of forced feminization and forced femme makeovers exist. Everything can be found on the Internet, right? There are also brick-and-mortar comportment and sissy schools where dominant females force their clients to become obedient maidservants for however long the client's Visa card has paid.

DRAG QUEENS AND KINGS

RuPaul is probably the most famous face for drag queens. He has been classic in his individuality and a proponent of establishing a counter-culture all his own. But, he is just the latest of many notable drag queens. Other notable personalities — including Divine, Dame Edna Everage, and Danny La Rue — have all made successful mainstream careers as male-to-female drag entertainers.

Most people who watch *RuPaul's Drag Race* think the contestants are a true representation. One of the popular misconceptions about drag queens is they must all be gay. Some are, of course. Many take on their female personas strictly as a form of self-exploration or performance art. Others look at their feminine facades as a statement of self-expression, whether for personal or public purposes.

While RuPaul represents the perfection of *high drag*, many others use a version of it as part of their everyday life. Remember, in the 1980s and 90s, when the emo Goth look was so prevalent? Plenty of young men used eyeliner, mascara and lipstick as part of their look — the practice could have been considered a form of drag by some standards.

Let's not forget women can portray a masculine persona. Many female entertainers work as drag kings to emulate popular male stars like the late Elvis Presley or Michael Jackson. Others pursue careers as comedians or in performance troupes. Julie Andrews herself had a successful run on Broadway and film in the title role in *Victor/Victoria*. In these cases, performers tape their breasts down, add a bit of stippling for facial scruff, and stuff a sock down their pants as a package to deliver to their audiences.

Whether dragging as a queen or a king, most can be found in club venues, dancing and lip-syncing for tips and championship titles. In larger cities, they can have a weekly revue as a headliner — if popular enough. Otherwise, you may find one in a neighborhood gay bar preening in the limelight as a local celebrity, chatting it up with the locals at the watering hole and feigning offers to perform when a karaoke machine is plugged in.

For Your Consideration ~

Why is it socially acceptable by both men and women that a female can successfully emulate the masculine form without reprisal, while a man doing the same in the feminine form is frowned upon?

Katherine Hepburn is a wonderful example of a woman ahead of her time. She was fiercely independent and shocked America with her non-conforming practice of wearing pants. Nowadays, most women wear leggings and stretch jeans without notice.

Annie Lenox, the famous international artist, made a habit of wearing short pixie hair and very masculine attire. She is considered an amazing talent and a fashion innovator. But, was she considered a crossdresser. In an article by Chris Azzopardi for PrideSource.com[18], Annie Lenox stated, „When I was given this label of ‚gender bender', I really felt it was diminishing in a way. It was very simplistic. I wasn't bending gender; I was making a statement in a kind of subtle way. I thought it was subtle, but to some people it might have seemed overt. I was saying, ‚Look, as a woman I can be equal to a man', and in this partnership with the Eurythmics, where I was in a partnership with a man (Dave Stewart), the two of us felt so connected that my gender didn't matter."

DRESS AND RELEASE

There is a cross-section (no pun intended) of men who dress for one reason, and one reason only. How shall I put this? They get dolled up as a pretty princess so they can have a happily-ever-after... dress as a sexy secretary so they can take one final dictation for the day... put on a French Maid uniform so they can dust off the ole stove pipe. If you still are confused by my silly analogies, let me be more straightforward. Some crossdressing men dress solely for the purpose of masturbation and sexual release.

Whatever the article of clothing — whether just a pair of panties, pantyhose, or a more complete ensemble — these men are sexually excited by feelings of femininity. They enjoy seeing themselves as a female when they masturbate. They imagine themselves as sexy women, loving the way the nylon, silk, or satin feels across their skin and against their fingers. They look in the mirror and say, „I would have sex with her."

Those taboo feelings and thoughts of femininity excite them and drive them to... take care of business south of the border. After the act is complete and the excitement subsides, those feelings of elation can quickly be replaced with a sense of shame or disgust. They may want to quickly clean up, undress, and put their feminine clothes away.

It is okay for a man to dress in softer and smoother fabrics, but donning what is still considered feminine clothing is still taboo. As a result, there is forbidden excitement for the wearer of these types of clothes. Our brains have been indoctrinated from an early age to divide between what defines a man and a woman — jobs, roles in the family, clothing

[18] https://pridesource.com/article/68228-2/

appropriate to each gender. The idea of wearing sexy, *forbidden* clothes can lead to excitement and the need to find a way to release the sexual tension accompanying it.

For Your Consideration ~

If a boy discovers crossdressing during adolescence and puberty, it can easily become part of their self-pleasure routine. The desire to become a female with the aid of the chosen clothing, in and of itself is a sensual and forbidden experiment. Looking in the mirror at that emerging female façade creates butterflies and sexual tension. If these boys had a proclivity to sexual release primarily through the act of feminine dressing, they can fall into repeated crossdressing as an adulthood fetish. If a boy crossdresses prior to sexual self-discovery, then it should not necessarily be considered the primary driver for their eventual gender identity and presentation.

CROSSPLAY/COSPLAY

The term cosplay means „costume play". It is not a torrid affair. It is the practice of dressing up as a character from a work of fiction (such as a comic book, video game, literature, or television show). The act has become more mainstream as people have embraced comics and sci-fi as part of pop culture.

Crossplay, a type of cosplay, is defined as dressing as a character of the opposite gender. In these cases, a man gender-bends as a female character such as Wonder Woman and Ms. Marvel, presenting in feminine costume as the heroine. They can also take a traditionally male character (the Joker or the Punisher) and morph it into a female version (although these gender-bending characters already exist... don't get me started 'cause I could geek out all day about it!). A woman can do the same with their favorite male characters (or a male version of a female character).

I have dressed as some of my favorite male and female comic superheroes. I have even coaxed my girlfriend into dressing as a heroine, villain and antiheroine for the last several comic book conventions. Plus, she looks amazing every year! Bonus!

The practice of costume play started as early as the 1930s[19], in North America, and has continued to grow in popularity. The term cosplay was coined by the Japanese reporter, Nobuyuki Takahashi, after he attended the 1984 Worldcon in Los Angeles. More and more people want to dress as their favorite Japanese anime or manga character, growing faster than a speeding bullet into all segments of pop culture (Dr. Who, Star Trek, Star Wars, Marvel, DC, and more).

At the New York Comic Con, although it was strange for some people to see Spider-Man's Black Cat walk down a New York City sidewalk, my girlfriend admitted that she felt somewhat empowered. She certainly pulled it off in grand fashion. When I was dressed as Ms. Marvel, I was less Savannah as I was the character I was emulating. It was more about taking on a different form of artistic expression, than just expressing my femininity. I was paying homage and respect to the character.

[19] https://the-artifice.com/cosplay-overview/

For Your Consideration ~

I have seen many females dress up as any of a number of male character Doctors from the Doctor Who series. How many girls want to dress up as Harry Potter. Are they considered crossdressers? No! They simply love specific characters so much they want to honor them by dressing as them.

Most comic book artists have exaggerated the human form for years and the proportions are unattainable. People come in all shapes, sizes, and colors — tall, thin, short, and stocky — and many want to dress up as their favorite character even though they do not have the classic comic book physique. If people want to pay homage to their favorite character in their own artistic way, please remember it takes confidence and courage to dress up at all.

Interestingly, I had typically shy away from cosplaying as male characters up until recent years. I always felt more comfortable as a female, even though it takes a lot more work to emulate the female form (with padding, breast forms, and corsetry). It took me years to recognize that — even though presenting as a woman is time-consuming work in as of itself — I also have a skewed sense of my own masculinity. There is something saddening about feeling the need to add padding to bulk up or cinchers to whittle my waist down so I feel comfortable in my male form.

ESCAPE ARTISTS

Life is stressful. It's a rat race. The corporate world is dog-eat-dog. The only two things guaranteed in life are death and taxes. Like Rick Springfield sang, *I'm working hard, I don't know why, I'm like a working-class dog, and I just get by*. Men come home from a hard day of work at the office and just want to relax with their newspaper, slippers, and packed pipe.

Male stereotypes in business and in the nuclear family dynamic is becoming an antiquated notion, especially in the 21st Century. In fact, I have seen strong women — one in particular who works a full career, has her own business, and raises three children — endure as much, if not more, stress than many of the men around her. But, I must keep my examples focused on crossdressing men who may see themselves in this profile.

Certain men — some in high-powered positions — have a need to come home and dress in something pretty. The transformation provides an outlet to let their minds and bodies drift away from all of the stresses of the day. What occurs is a subtle shift in cognitive reality. The act of feminine dressing allows them to be like Alice in Wonderland — escaping down a proverbial rabbit hole into a land of make believe. Comforted by the tight confining pantyhose or soft cashmere sweater — maybe in full makeup, maybe not — the feminine identities do not share the same problems as their masculine counterparts. Watch Johnny Depp in Tim Burton's semi-biographical film *Ed Wood*. It certainly illustrates this concept in graphic detail.

For an hour or an evening, our female personas can stride around washing dishes, watching television, or going for a walk or drive, without worrying about the outstanding

dilemmas of *his* day-to-day life. Some men work out at the gym, jog, or obsess over a hobby or sports team's standings. Others put on panties and a skirt to unwind.

For Your Consideration ~

Understanding why the act of crossdressing makes us calmer and more at ease could be attributed to the fact that we need to have an outlet for our inherent feminine sides. Conversely, since we have this need to dress, the stress of suppressing our second gender identity may cause more us more tension. Crossdressers who deny their feminine identities will tend to feel off when forced to curb their behavior to conform to what others consider acceptable.

EXPERIMENTERS

Some of us want to dress in women's lingerie or panties as an exhilarating experiment with our partners in the bedroom. What can it hurt to want to be that sexy girl once in a while? Why do women get all the most colorful, satiny and lacy stuff to wear? It's all a bit unfair, in my opinion.

Will these become a periodic kink, or serve as a gateway to full-blown crossdressing? Maybe... maybe not. Crossdressers are, most times, born, not made. A man confident in his sexuality and open to sexual exploration would be happy to participate in this type of intimate cross-play, without it becoming a discovery of their own suppressed femininity. In some cases, the female partner will bring up this idea for an alternative to bedroom play, designed as scenarios to humiliate, dominate, or stimulate their spouse/partner.

For Your Consideration ~

What needs to be considered, though, is the fact a crossdresser's partner may not find any attraction to a feminized husband or boyfriend during intimacy. Some partners will not be open to the thought of this form of intimate experimentation, while others will gladly take part in dissecting the roles of gender in the bedroom.

COMEDIANS

Halloween is said to be the crossdressers' Christmas. It's the one night of the year a man can explore his feminine side without much public scrutiny. He is able to explain the presentation away as parody. Yes, it is true many of us crossdressers have used Halloween to introduce our feminine sides to the world. Most men, however, simply dress up as a female character for fun or as part of a gender-bending couple's costume concept. Read even more about the subject of crossdressers at Halloween later in this book!

For Your Consideration ~

I do not recall whispered conversation on All Saint's Day about any woman who had decided to dress up as Charlie Chaplin on Halloween. But, if a man had dressed as Marilyn Monroe at the same office party, murmurs may go around about his motivations.

Personally, I have now successfully dressed as a female character for several Halloween office parties. At first, I was terrified my co-workers would look at me in a way

that silently screamed, „He's a crossdresser!" Now, after five- or six-years-worth of costumes, it has become almost a challenge by my officemates (like a gauntlet being cast down at my feet) to see what new feminine costume I will develop next!

PRINCESSES, BRIDES, FAIRIES AND MORE

Princesses, brides, secretaries, maids, and fairies show up in the same section on my list. What do they have in common? The above list represents the same thing it does for most young girls — a stereotype or ideal of ultimate femininity. The roles on this list are an exaggeration of femininity based on our acceptance of gender stereotypes. Even with gender equality, men and women still tend to conform to what is *normal* and *expected* in the roles and responsibilities for masculinity and femininity.

Most women expect to wear an expensive white flowing dress on their wedding day. Some little girls want to wear Disney Princess dresses around the house (and to the grocery store with mommy). Accessorizing with sparkled wings and a wand will let the little girl soar as high as her imagination allows.

For Your Consideration ~

Why do most little girls gravitate toward Fisher Price kitchen sets, Barbie Dream Houses, and Disney Princesses? Sure, one could advocate that what boys and girls want is the result of years of mass marketing. The advertising was built in a specific way because it works! Focus groups and marketing research has proven little boys and girls want what they want. Girls want dolls and boys want Legos (I love, love, love my Legos!... even as a part-time girl). Is the advertising a result of what we want, or is what we want a result of the advertising? Hmmm.

The typical gender-defined, female-dominated roles cannot be fulfilled by men. Leave it to Beaver's June Cleaver cleaned the house and prepared family dinners in her semi-formal dresses and pearls. Women have the honor of walking down the aisle in a white satin and lace wedding gown. They get the pretty dresses and a closet full of „nothing to wear". Some of us want to emulate those female roles. We want to step into those stereotypes. We want to feel that inherent spark of femininity, the synapses in our brains electric with tactile memory and wish fulfillment that allows us to believe we can be women. According to gender stereotypes, men could never be brides. As our feminine selves, we can become one through the simple act of donning such attire.

For More of Your Consideration ~

There is a fine line between dressing as a maid while cleaning the house for your wife and dressing as a rubber-clad French maid strolling the city streets. While crossdressers and fetishists share some similar feminine fantasies and wish fulfillment scenarios, the non-fetish crossdresser will typically gravitate toward more appropriate clothing for private and public use while the fetishist will be found in their attire of choice regardless of the event or situation.

SYBIL DRESSERS

Remember that television movie, *Sybil?* Sally Field portrayed a woman with multiple personalities. Each persona packed into Sybil's psyche was there to protect her. *Some of it seems like medical hokum*, you might say. Well, I cannot speculate on the validity of medical science or of documented cases. I am here to tell you, like discussed in the Escape Artists section, a distinct shift in thinking occurs for some crossdressers when dressed. For myself, I have more confidence to dance! I am very self-conscious about my dancing abilities as a man, but let me slip on my LBD and heels — and put on the song that makes me squeal, „That's my jam!" — and I'll race to the dance floor.

But enough about me.

Crossdressers who dress to de-stress are different than Sybil dressers. The former type let the cares of the workday slip away as they slide on their favorite feminine clothes. They go about their personal lives when dressed, enjoying the escape, comfort, and distance their alter-persona provides. The Sybil dressers, on the other hand, have a wholly separate female identity and demeanor to protect themselves from earlier torments. They also dress to escape the turmoil and stress of their male lives. Whether it is from mental or physical abuse as a youth, or from a lifetime of denial or depression, the female persona — in this case — serves as a dissociative identity (see possible dissociative identity disorder DID[20]). The male side can be gruff and coarse while the female persona can be more reserved and content. The man can be quick to anger, while the woman inside him is patient and cool.

It does seem strange that clothes would make the difference, but, for these crossdressing men, the clothes are the catalysts invoking a comforting form... a desired form... a form better equipped for the situation. Like Billy Batson speaking the word Shazam! to become the super-powered DC Comics Captain Marvel, these men become the women, in mind and spirit, to combat and quell the stressful internal voices and grinding metal-on-metal gears of worry.

For Your Consideration ~

For a man with inherent dual gender, his feminine presentation can be a welcome escape. The act can afford the capture of an elusive intangible spiritual quality that only Gaia (Mother Earth) would understand. It is important to understand what may drive someone to a wholly separate female persona. I would strongly recommend therapy to better ascertain a proper direction for your feminine journey in this case — whether the path is cemented in crossdressing or heading toward transition.

THE TACTILE-TICIAN

This may be a strange title. I couldn't find what I was looking for in the urban dictionary, so I made something up. I based it on the Latin word tactilis, „able to be touched"[21]. What does this made up term mean to me? Well, women have it so much better than men in the

[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissociative_identity_disorder

[21] https://latin-dictionary.net/definition/36730/tactilis-tactilis-tactile

clothing department. They have many more style options in the workplace, while their male counterparts get to wear a suit... or, maybe, a suit. What a choice! If it is a business casual environment, men get to wear dress pants and a dress shirt... maybe even [gasp] a Polo shirt.

I crave soft, shiny and smooth materials, loving the feel of a soft fabric sliding across the skin and caressing the body in all the right places. Most women who wear pantyhose for work can't wait to strip them off when they get home. We crossdressing men long to feel the material on our legs for as long as we can — some to the point of fetishizing them.

Isn't that bordering on obsessive?

Some of our fixation may be due to the infrequency of our ability to dress. Additionally, the feeling of patted-down-dry shaved legs — encased in a pair of limb hugging stockings — is an utterly exhilarating exercise. We love the way the air flows across the nylon as we walk. We adore the way the nylon feels when we stroke (get your mind out of the gutter, ladies and gentlemen!) our fingers along our thighs and calves.

Some women seem to have lost the joy — what the Righteous Brothers described as *that loving feeling* — with what they wear. Dressing, in many cases, has become a utilitarian process, based on what is expected as part of their gender role. Take the example of the pantyhose and bra that women shed as soon as they get home. Somewhat lost is the art of *becoming*. Yes, I believe with the passage of time some have forgotten about the tactile sensations of fabric and fashions.

My girlfriend picks out blouses and tops because she loves the way they feel through her fingers. But once purchased and worn a few times, does she consciously continue to take a moment to appreciate what she is wearing? Jen says, „yes". Does she look in the mirror and realize the power of her clothing? Jen says, „Realize the power of what I am wearing? Uh...no."

Crossdressing men appreciate the clothes they wear. For male crossdressers, feminine clothing possesses power and completes their sense of being. A pair of pantyhose encases the legs, making them feel more feminine and shimmery. A satin top is soft and slick, evoking a sensual wrap of protection. A skirt or a dress, unique to women in modern society (except those Scotsmen's kilts), screams out their feminine roots!

For Your Consideration ~

We can fixate on the perfection of our feminine presentation. We forget women, having had to live a certain way their entire lives, may take their own femininity for granted. Just like we do with our manhood.

As an addendum to this section, I have found myself — with more opportunities to dress as Savannah — not wanting to suffer through wearing higher heels all the time in order to feel more feminine. I haven't resorted to flats, yet, thank the goddess, but I am starting to appreciate feminine comfort as much as the feminine appearance. In addition, every trip to Kohl's brings with it a trip to the Women's Department where I let my fingers decide on clothing instead of the ultra–feminine styles possibly less comfortable. These are strange days, indeed.

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

If I had to put a label on myself — I must state I truly hate labels, both as they apply to our identities and how other people feel they need to bucket us — I would settle myself into The Girl Next Door category. Even though I have found myself in different groupings over the years (more on that later on in *Savannah's Story*), this is the archetype of type of feminine spirit I consider for myself. The Girl Next Door is perceived as approachable, kind and unassuming[22]. I see myself as just an everyday male who enjoys expressing my feminine side as often as warranted.

The Girl Next Door strives to be stylish without being garish (unless the event calls for it... we are always up for a challenge!). If you saw her in a restaurant or on the street, you may need a moment to determine whether you had seen a man or a woman. The Girl Next Door will try to blend in. We have advanced to a more mature (not matronly – never that!) style more alluring, practical, and appropriate for the occasion.

For Your Consideration ~

What could be more enjoyable than a nice day or evening out? Whether at a bar or in a club setting, a coffee shop, lounge or restaurant, I am happiest when I am accepted as a true individual. There is a distinct difference between being accepted as an „out" crossdresser versus a woman named Savannah. Acceptance in society is, for me in particular, when I am treated like everyone else. When I lived in NYC, acceptance came in the form of indifference — haha!

I want to be able to walk out the front door without worry of judgment from others. I want to blend in, not because I worry about being ‚clocked' but because I want to simply enjoy life like any other human being. As a result, I try to carry myself with confidence, ready to radiate a smile to disarm any stares of curiosity or disdain.

Many crossdressers try to imagine a public life not met with scorn from the general populace. One problem we face is our inherent secrecy. While many gays, lesbians and transitioning men and women have emerged to a growing acceptance, crossdressers are a mostly hidden faction still considered to be fetishists and part-timers. I look to raise our visibility in an effort to dispel the lingering stigma wrapped around us.

TRANSVESTIC FETISHISM

The people clinically diagnosed with Transvestic Fetishism must exhibit two key criteria. The first is the individual (man or woman) must be sexually aroused by the act of crossdressing. Secondly, the individual must experience significant distress or impairment (at work, socially, privately, in their relationships, etc.) as a result of their behavior.

Types of fetishism include, but are not limited to, the collection of specific types of lingerie, stockings or pantyhose, bridal gowns, sissy dresses, and the like in order to achieve

[22] https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=girl%20next%20door

sexual satisfaction. They have more of an obsessive-compulsive need to dress in a very specific way — for a very specific and desired result.

Be aware that Transvestic Fetishism is different from the pre-adolescent crossdressing boy discovering herself as hormones rage during his sexual awakening. It is also different from new girls finding themselves attracted to feminine clothing as adults. These are examples of people trying to understand their identity. They will most likely be sexually aroused by the experiences. Only those who dress for the obsessive desire for arousal would be designated into the category of Transvestic Fetishism, similar to those crossdressers in the Dress and Release section.

For Your Consideration ~

Recently, I found myself wondering if the act of crossdressing is a mental illness. I mean, how would I know I have a damaged brain if I have been living with this condition (as if it were normal) for my entire life? I asked the question of Jen and of others if they considered me mentally unstable because of my desire to dress as a woman. They shrugged and shook their heads. They have accepted Savannah as a part of who I am.

Of course, their answers didn't satisfy my curiosity so I went to the ultimate authority — the Internet!! I asked Google the question, „is crossdressing as a mental illness". Google told me, that in 2017, George R. Brown, MD, Professor and Associate Chairman of Psychiatry, East Tennessee State University; Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry, University of North Texas wrote that most crossdressers did not exhibit the condition of a mental illness[23]. Only if the crossdressing behavior caused a state of great distress or a lack of the ability to function in everyday life would a clinical diagnosis of a Transvestic Disorder be considered appropriate.

I admit when I cannot be Savannah often enough (once a week), it can be distressing and affect my mood. She will always need an expressive outlet in order for me to stay in balance.

INFANTS AND BABY GIRLS

There are men who prefer a regression to a child-like state of innocence. Some like to wear diapers under their male clothing. I have seen, through Facebook posts, men who enjoy the risk of being discovered — in public — by having the diaper's gathered waistband on display. Some like to dress in frilly panties and petticoats with pink bows in their hair, acting like little pre-adolescent girls or their approximation of how they think proper little girls should act.

Known by several names — paraphilic infantilism, psychosexual infantilism, adult baby syndrome — this phenomenon does not have much information on why some men choose to wear diapers and adult-sized satin dresses adorned with bows and fluffed out with petticoats.

[23] https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/mental-healthdisorders/sexuality/transvestism

Some enjoy drinking from a bottle, participating in gentle and nurturing experiences with a „parent“ partner, or erotic release from their own discomfort or humiliation.

A feeling of regression may occur to a facsimile of a simpler era where dresses and proper childish comportment was expected. Maybe, they enjoy how the diapers feel. Maybe, they search for an echo of tactile sensations from their infancy.

SISSIES

In my previous book, I had lumped together „Sissies“ with „Infants and Baby Girls“. With additional research, I realized I had really misclassified them because I had failed to adequately understand them. While those labeled infants or baby girls are in a state of feminine regression, sissies are in a varying state of gender reversal. Do not hold me to task based on my limited exposure to the archetype. Typically, men who are sissies have submitted to a dominant man or woman in order to have their masculinity stripped away.

They have volunteered to be forced-feminized into being a sissy under fantasy conditions (most times). They are degraded for being inherently „manly“. They are forced to wear maid's outfits, satin dresses with petticoats, and subjugate themselves to performing chores and tasks stereotypically defined for women. Their „manhood“ is sometimes caged so sexual stimulation is painful. Hypnosis, verbal debasing, and other methods can be employed to further condition the sissy into a role of permanent — or reversible — femininity.

BEARDED LADIES

Like the previous two sections, this group's motivation is also mostly foreign to me — although I am learning more about it all the time. Some men who dress as women — but, do not try to hide their facial hair — can be labeled as genderqueer. They don't conform to conventional gender distinctions, either identifying with a combination of male and female genders or none at all. They take on the attributes of both sexes as an amalgam for their presentation.

Since the original writing of my first book, I have met a couple of crossdressing men who consider themselves genderqueer. As the description implies, these individuals are comfortable with expressing both the masculine and feminine aspects in a single presentation. One went so far as to tell me he was, in fact, uncomfortable shaving his beard. His family and friends had come to expect him with facial hair, so he dressed as his feminine self without shaving it off.

For Your Consideration ~

Crossdressing men may be kept from taking their female presentation to the fullest degree because of their concern about what others may think or say about them as men. For example, some crossdressers detest the hair on their bodies because it keeps them from being able to wear more revealing clothing. But, they keep from manscaping because family or friends may pry into their motivations for doing so.

I, personally, have experienced the worry that everyone around me knows I am a crossdresser. Whether perusing the lingerie racks at Nordstrom or buying a pair of three-

inch pumps at DSW, any stare or question raised by the people or staff around me sets off warning flares and sounds off klaxons.

In reality, most people aren't all that concerned about what you do — beyond a simple curiosity. And, department store staff or cashiers? Well, they're just doing their jobs and trying to make a sale.

STEALTH DRESSERS

Sounds very clandestine, doesn't it? The phrase itself conjures up images of pretty British lady spies with an easily-assessable pistol tucked up under a garter underneath their glittery evening gown.

I'm sorry... what were we talking about?

Stealth crossdressers.

Oh yeah... stealth crossdressers.

They fall into this category either out of necessity or want. I have one friend who isn't „out" except to his wife. He chooses to wear androgynous women's clothing on an everyday basis. He chooses slacks with smaller pockets and no zipper, shoes with low heels, and deeper V-neck tops in softer fabrics from the women's department that allow him to feel feminine while being able to still pass masculine scrutiny with his own friends and clients. Others, like myself, wear some type of women's apparel under our male clothes on a daily basis. While I don't dress everyday as Savannah, I have long ago replaced all of the men's boxers and briefs in my underwear drawer with women's panties. Others wear pantyhose under their clothes, wanting to experience the silky and compressing caress of the nylons on their legs — plus, maybe, feel a bit naughty and sensual. I'm not a fan of pantyhose for everyday use under my male clothes, finding them rolling —too much and too often — over at the waistband. Ugh! Women, can I get a wha-what?!

WEEKEND WARRIOR PRINCESSES

We are all fierce in our own way. Some of us just don't have an opportunity — or a need — to show it off as often as others. Whether because of lack of desire, busy scheduling, raising children and having a family life, or the need to keep crossdressing a secret, some men only dress on rare occasions. Dresses and wigs may be stored in our everyday closets. Or, they may be secreted away in closets, an attic, in rarely-used suitcases, out-buildings, in the trunk of cars, or in off-site storage units — gathering dust until we have the drive and opportunity to access what we need for a feminine expression.

Whatever our motivations are for dressing — comfort, stress relief, sensuality, to feel pretty once in a while — we choose to live a mostly male life, with smatterings of glittery feminine moments sprinkled throughout. Whether dressing in our homes, venturing out to private parties, or simply going to the local Starbucks for a latte with our femme names on the cup, the experience may occur only on a rare Saturday or Sunday, but it does provide us with enough feminine spirit to fill our tanks until the next time.

MASKERS

Maskers? What the heck is that?

Simply put, maskers are people who wear masks or other facial appliances to either hide their identity or derive pleasure from the act. The Kigurumi wear the Japanese style big head anime masks. Enclosure fetishists generally like rubber catsuits and masks for restrictive play. Additionally, people dressing up as rubber dolls just want to look cute. Furries, doms and subs, and cosplayers could be added into the mix — some of them wearing masks of some type in their own expression, as well.

Why would a crossdresser want to wear a mask? That does seem strange, right? Well, I can think of a couple reasons. First, I know crossdressers who use masks to keep from being recognized in their photos on their social media channels — especially with the increasing sophistication of facial recognition. The same concern for recognition applies in public settings. Remember the bearded ladies? Another reason to mask is to affect a feminine façade without sacrificing facial hair in favor of a feminine presentation. Lastly, I have met CDs who lack confidence in their feminine appearance and makeup skills, turning to prefabricated female masks with perfect makeup already baked onto the surface.

For Your Consideration ~

And, of course, I recognize the crossdressing irony. When I transform from my male self into Savannah, I am also wearing a mask that hides my „true" identity. The makeup, the wig, the padding, and all of the other things helping to become my feminine persona are, in fact, masks. Chris Rock once performed a stand-up routine outlining the following ideals... „Women who wear heels aren't that tall... That weave is not their real hair... That push-up bra isn't fooling' anyone...!" Crossdressers inherently mask their appearance in order to facilitate their female form. CDs are the last people who should cast stones at others who wear masks!

LAND OF CONFUSION

Did you find anything that resonated with you?

I hope so.

A spectrum of gender duality exists, generalized to the simple label of crossdressing or, sometimes, the more clinical medical description transvestism. Imagine Midtown Manhattan's Empire State Building, each floor defined as a type of transgender expression. The subways and garages are on the lowest levels, representing the closeted and underground fetishists. Hop on the escalator to the main concourses where the glitzy shops serve as an analogy for the flamboyant drag queens and high art performers. After shopping, you figure you better get to work on the 18th floor. The companies operating throughout the building are fairly autonomously, each office very similar to the others.

For the typical non-fetish, non-transitioning crossdressing male, it's just business as usual.

But what about the observation deck, Savannah? Isn't that where every crossdresser wants to go?

That is a great question... and a fear of many partners of crossdressing men. The average crossdresser aims to perfect their feminine illusion. We do the best we can with the makeup skills learned, and the corsets, padding and dresses purchased. Sure, we may imagine a fantasy where — for a moment — we step out onto the observation deck as a fully realized woman. While a nice daydream, I'm not willing to pay the price to ride the elevator up to the top floor every day. I enjoy my duality, being able to operate in life as a man (for most of the time) and as a woman (when the mood strikes).

I like my parts just the way they are, thank you very much!

So, if you like your gender and the parts God gave you at birth, why do you need to crossdress as a woman in the first place?

Killer question, dear reader! Let's try to figure that out together.

2.8. Why We Do It

For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‚If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been ‚No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

~ Steve Jobs

We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.

~ Walt Disney

INTRODUCTION

Hopefully, with the preceding information from me and a bit of introspection from you, you may have recognized yourself in one or more of the previous chapter's vignettes. So, armed with a better understanding of your specific Combination of Life settings and what type of crossdresser you may be (or, might have been), the next question you may ask yourself is, „Why do I do it?"

When we dress in feminine attire, we find a sense of balance. We are happy to see the feminine creature reflected in the mirror. We find contentment. But, why do we feel this way about it? Why do we have this need? Why are we different from *normal* people?

My answer comes in the form of another question. Why do you need to be like everyone else? People who crossdress cover all nationalities, political leanings, ethnicities, religions and economic classes. I once heard that crossdressing was reported (not sure in what consensus) to affect one out of every ten men. We can be a pizza delivery guy, mail courier, doctor, judge, senator... We are not terminally unique, by any stretch of the imagination. Any local support group, meet-up website, or social media channel will quickly dispel that theory. It's a big wide world and we have our place in it.

CRY BABIES

Imagine crying babies and their security blankets. If they're in a new situation and without their mommy, they may be unable to process their feelings of disconnect, fear and stress. But, if you give them their favorite blankie, they will be quieted and comforted by its familiar texture, smell, and softness.

Crossdressers also find comfort in their dressing — a feeling of wholeness. Whatever the root cause for our need to physically dress in feminine attire, the result is also transformative to our state of mind. I won't say the act of dressing changes the chemicals in our brain, but I will say it does shift our perceptions in some measure. Are we trying to balance an inherent psychology and physiology that is outside the socially accepted gender norms? I would say, „Yes."

APPROPRIATE TOYS

When I grew up, it was very evident in our household I was only supposed to play with the twelve-inch (again, keep your minds out of the gutter, please) Adventure Team

Commander GI Joe® action figure. Barbie® was only for my sister to play with. If we called Malibu Barbie® an action figure, would it have been suddenly acceptable to play with?

Boys play with trucks, toy guns, and dress up like firemen and astronauts; girls play with dolls, wear princess dresses, and prepare meals in their Easy Bake ovens. We are hard-wired to want certain things, even as children. I know of one four-year-old girl who begged her parents for a plastic stacked washer and dryer set for Christmas. The parents were puzzled, but Santa made sure to leave that particular gift under the tree.

Was the request a result of wanting to emulate what the girl saw her mother do? Or, was she just enamored with the idea of her own home appliances? If her brother had made the same request, would it have been granted by Mom and Dad? Modern parents are much more aware of gender identification and preference, even as it affects children as young as three or four-years-old.

For your Consideration~

In the last twenty to thirty years, we have experienced a gradual shift in both the marketing of toys and the attention certain types of childhood activities have been given. The rise of video games, multi-player online play, and other electronic and digital media have allowed the young to look into fantasy worlds in a way that we, as children growing up at the end of the last century, couldn't fathom in such a visual way. Is it possible the exposure to such massive amounts of graphical input allows us to dream bigger than ever?

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

In my era (I'm a Gen X-er, I will leave it at that), the still-infantile World Wide Web was the only source of „new" information to help any young boy who might have had an attraction to wearing his sister's clothes. Anything else discovered about crossdressing was limited to the back of porn magazines and classified ads, labeled as fetish and forbidden underground erotica. How could we consider ourselves normal in the face of the information we had at our disposal? Wait... I think I may have drifted off on a tangent. Let's walk back to the question of, „Why do we do it?"

WHY DO WE DO IT? REDUX

Let's try this again... why do we crossdress?

The initial asking of the question is to presuppose the question needs to be answered in the first place. Will any response really be satisfactory? Can we effectively answer a question when we don't fully understand our motivations? Is an answer required only because we are forced to defend our *condition* to others?

So, crossdressers have a condition and we are not normal? I can't be cured? That's okay... I didn't realize I was sick. I always felt normal, but I guess I should thank those people for pointing out the fact that I am not normal.

HISTORICAL ACCURACY

If we look back into the history of fashion, we can see numeric examples of men dressing in a way that — to the modern eye — seems feminine. Our Founding Fathers wore buckled heels and white powdered wigs. Elizabethan and Victorian era Royalty is depicted in drawings and paintings as monarchs draped in satins, silks, and other lacy fineries. Their powdered faces and wigs could be considered close to the modern interpretation of what a male crossdresser or a drag queen looks like. I guarantee, though, that if I ran into William Wallace and his Celtic broadsword from *Braveheart*, I would not point out the absurdity of his kilt.

They can take our kilts, but they can't take our manhood!

I'm paraphrasing, of course.

The examples above illustrate the always-changing social fabric tied to the fashion elite. No matter the era, clothing makes the man or woman. The question is, „Who decided what is socially acceptable... that men only wear suits and women only wear dresses?" I see plenty of women wearing jeans and pants at work and at home, so I guess they are all crossdressing females.

I do not believe I am alone in the realization of the severe double standard concerning the acceptability of gender-specific clothing. I mean, entire lines of gender-skewed clothing are made for women, geared toward the theme of borrowing the boyfriend's shirt or boy short underwear. So... even men's fashion has been commandeered by women! Other than more fashionable colors, softer fabrics and having more acceptable accessories, what male clothing line has been successfully launched with a predominantly feminine flair?

WHY DO YOU ASK?

But, why do I have the need to dress up as a woman, Savannah? Sure, the clothes are an integral part of what I love about dressing as a woman. But what's the reason? Why can't I stop?

Thank you for bringing me back to the topic at hand. Based on the types of crossdressers discussed earlier (and, understand, I only scratched the surface), what follows are a few reasons why men desire to emulate the fairer sex. First, they may find their feminine dressing provides an escape from their specific reality. Second, some may be trying to fulfill a balance with their psyche through the physical expression of femininity. Third, the act of dressing may be a means to fulfill a fantasy or experience a sexual high. Lastly, crossdressing may be a waystation in the search for a true feminine identity as transitioning women.

All I can hope is to bring illumination to the *whys* of the non-transitioning, non-fetish crossdresser. There is an obvious urge to dress. Based on the type of crossdresser you consider yourself to be, your motivations will differ. In fact, even within the same group, an individual's reasons are inherently unique.

SEX-ED

While I mentioned a „sexual high" above, crossdressing is not a wholly sexual experience for most (unless the dressing is strictly for fetish). By focusing on how the feminine clothing feels on the body and how the makeup changes our male appearance, the act of becoming

can be highly sensualized. It is a sensory experience felt all over the body, not just the erogenous zone between our legs.

Crossdressing boys, like me, inherently gravitated to our mother's bureaus or sister's dresser. We were drawn to the fabrics, colors, their cut, how it made women look — the articles themselves fascinating us. When our mothers were folding clothes on the bed, we found ourselves staring at the strange and wonderful articles that we knew weren't in our own drawers. We wondered what it would feel like to put on a pair of silky underwear, a soft slip or a pair of pretty dress heels. It didn't matter the clothing or shoes were too big. It only mattered how they felt through our fingers, how they felt on us, and how wearing them made us feel transformed and complete.

There are dozens of conflicting feelings. From physical excitement before and during the experience — typically through adolescence — to regret or shame afterward, we have been indoctrinated to believe the act was inappropriate. From the taboo of dressing up like a girl, to the awkwardness of adolescent self-pleasure, to the burden of managing the secrets, being a teenage male crossdresser is wrought with emotional strife.

As an adult, introduction to the world of crossdressing comes in many forms. There can be an urge component. A man can be introduced to crossdressing by coaxing or by accident. Sometimes (like what you hear when watching episodes of *Criminal Minds*) a stressor event occurs. Other times, a man simply stops denying his feminine urges suppressed by a lifetime of shame and mainstream non-acceptance.

I have a close male-to-female crossdressing friend, Victoria, who may have waited longer to pursue her true nature if it hadn't been for a cis-girlfriend asking him to try on a pair of panties as a part of their sexual foreplay. Since the act of crossdressing was supported within the relationship, it became normal for them. That first pair of panties led to a second (and so forth). They eventually broke up for other reasons, but those acts inside the relationship prompted Victoria to continue exploring those urges upon a path of self-discovery of femininity.

So, what have we learned? Are we enlightened about why men like to dress as women? No? I guess we should continue to explore, then.

MINORITY REPORT

According to the article, „Transgender Population Size in the United States: a Meta-Regression of Population-Based Probability Samples", by Esther L. Meerwijk, and Jae M. Sevelius, PhD, the plain-language summary results read as:

„We used data from national surveys to estimate the population size of transgender people in the United States. Estimates of the number of transgender adults significantly increased over the past decade, with a current best estimate of 390 per 100,000 adults. That is about 1 in every 250 adults, or almost 1 million Americans. These numbers may be more typical of younger adults than of the entire US population. We expect that future surveys will

find higher numbers of transgender people and recommend that standardized questions be used, which will allow a more accurate population size estimate."[24]

Whoa! That's a lot to take in!

I will let you discover and read the survey's details on your own. Suffice to say, the results claim the possibility of the existence of up to one million transgender persons in America. Of course, that statistic puts all trans-related persons in the same bucket. And since crossdressers are probably the most secretive (alright... I'll say it... the most ,in the closet'), I imagine the reported numbers are lower than the true count.

At the end of the day, the reasons for *why* we crossdress may never be satisfactory to our friends, our family, our partners, or even to ourselves. If we finally found out how and why the dead returned to life in George Romero's film, *The Night of the Living Dead*, would we be satisfied with the answer? Maybe. Maybe, not. The point is... chasing an elusive and vague *why* may never get you the answers you think you need.

IN CLOSING

Each crossdressing man's motivations are as individualized as grains of sand on a tropical beach. Without opening ourselves up to personal introspection, we will never fully understand the reasons why we need a feminine persona for our dual gender. And, because every crossdresser's journey is different — the result of psychology, experience, genetics, environment, and other drivers — there is no pat answer.

The hope for individual understanding can only come from inside you. It is a corny statement, but is the truth for all of us. We are the only ones to experience our lives. We are the only ones who know anything about what is in our minds and hearts. The journey through the waters of self-discovery is difficult, and can only be crossed by a single person manning (no pun intended) the oars in their own rowboat.

So, was reading this chapter akin to what Dorothy experienced once she reached the Emerald City? Have I always had the ability to go home to Kansas, even from the very start of the Yellow Brick Road? Are you saying I have had the answers inside me all along?

Something like that, dear reader.

There is a fear that if we truly understand who we are — when we assume who we are is socially unacceptable — we will reinforce the belief we embody the label of something undesirable. We fear we are something to be loathed and treated with disgust; something abnormal, something to be debased, something filled with perversion. We fear giving in to these crossdressing urges will lead to male-to-female transition, an attraction to men, or the admission of a fetish or mental illness. You worry the world you have carefully cultivated and grown accustomed to could collapse if you let all these new thoughts loose in your head.

But are those things the truth? Will your world implode?

Be open to understanding yourself. Be honest with who you are. Examine everything you know to be your personal truth. Because, if you eventually decide you want your

[24] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5227946/

crossdressing persona to live in the bigger world, there will be more questions to answer — for yourself and the important people in your life.

Currently, researchers are hoping to discover more about why we think the way we do. I fully expect an „aha“ moment where science finds out our brain chemistry or physiology is inherently different from what is considered the typical variants. Maybe, one day, we will be considered a true derivative of gender. Until then, we can only endeavor to understand our current personal truths. Origins are easy stories to tell. The reason for the origin itself is a bit tougher to decipher.

Wow... great... no answers to any of my great mysteries. Thanks a lot. Wait... you said there would be questions to answer. What questions?

What questions, you ask? Let me start you off with an easy question... ahem... „How long have you been dressing this way?“

2.9. Crossdressing Lifers

I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. And when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice. But still, the place you live in is that much more grey.

~ Ellis "Red" Redding from *The Shawshank Redemption*

REALIZATIONS

Some crossdressing men, like me, have been dressing since a young age, realizing we were different from the other kids as early as five- or six-years-old. That is not to say we stopped identifying as a boy in favor of wanting to be a girl. We simply discovered an attraction to the clothing of the opposite gender, even before a mature understanding of our gender or sexuality.

Else, there are men who realized their crossdressing tendencies only once they reached adulthood. Whether as a result of denial, trauma, lack of exposure or opportunity or other factors, these men discover a fascination for feminine clothing well past their teenage years.

THE LIFERS: AN INTRODUCTION

The Lifer found the allure of feminine clothing at an early pre-adolescent age. My story started with acts of self-discovery. I snuck into my mom's room to see what treasures awaited in her dresser drawer. Others discover they were drawn to girlie clothes from an experience brought on by a friend or family member. Maybe, a sister thought it would be hilarious to dress him up in one of their old dresses. We found comfort and happiness in the clothing. It just *felt* right.

CHILDISH STUDIES

Adults may attribute a sexual component to the act after discovering their young son had dressed up in their older sister's underwear. Please remember that sexuality is a mature concept — and a terrible misconception. Even in this modern digital era — where children are bombarded with so much external information and stimuli — they still don't fully grasp gender identity and sexuality in the same way adults do.

According to a Texas A&M University study[25], children naturally gravitate to same-gender toys by age one. Interestingly, the females had a significant preference to their female-typical toys, while their male infant counterparts showed only a small preference to male-typical toys over female-typical toys. What does that say about children see the world? As adults, we still make assumptions about what a little boy or girl should do, don't we?

A little boy parading around the house in mommy's heels is hardly an indication of any proof of his future gender identity or sexuality. Maybe, he liked the noise the shoes made when clicked on the hardwood floors. Maybe, he just wanted to mimic what his big sister was doing. At three- or four-years-old, he doesn't know he is not supposed to wobble around in

[25] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230810604_Early_androgens_activity_levels_and_toy_choices_of_children_in_the_second_year_of_life

mom's shoes. If his sister is doing it, or he had a strong influence from his mother or grandmother, it would be understandable that he would want to emulate what he had seen them do. Many times, parents project their own life experiences, fears, and stigmas onto their child's behavior. The innocence and wonder children enjoy — and adults envy — should be fostered and cultivated. An individual will always gravitate to their true nature, if given enough latitude and support. Please remember, just because a little boy may dress up in girl clothes or play with dolls does not mean they will grow up with a gender duality, alternative gender, or a need to be re-assigned as a girl. For example, should a parent force a child to write right-handed if they find them trying to scrawl their names in block letters with a crayon with their left hand? Social acceptability and standards are imposed on us at an early age, even as we attempt to embrace that which makes us different.

INHERENT UNDERSTANDING

Growing up in the Reagan Era, I had an instinct to keep my feminine adventures to myself. I somehow understood the need to veil my enthusiasm about my feminine dressing, *certain* my parents would consider my actions unacceptable. Looking back, I can point out several examples of why I felt that way. My father was quick to point out and disparage homosexuals, African Americans, and mixed marriages. My mom was less committal about her worldviews, but did little to positively reinforce ‚love for all'. Needless to say, I didn't enjoy a home environment that seemed inviting enough to openly share my feminine feelings.

Hence, the roots of stigma took hold.

As crossdressing children, we quickly become adept at keeping this component of our lives compartmentalized. We take advantage of alone moments, frantically dressing in mom's dressy heels (that she never wears anymore, anyway), her girdles and slips, or dressing in our big sister's leotards, swimsuits or other clothing of hers that fit us a little more snugly.

BOX OF TISSUES

As we grow into adolescence, the sexual component arrives right along with it. Our hormones rage and we start to understand the more definitive gender differences between boys and girls. Our erupting new appreciation for girls (or boys, for some) compounds our need to dress in a desirable feminine way. It could be argued the allure of adolescent crossdressing is a result of hormonal self-promotion.

How so?

As a teenage boy, while the aforementioned testosterone is taking over all of his critical thinking, the act of crossdressing will typically lead to self-exploration, the rise of excitement in the *private* areas, and to the eventual act of masturbation. The euphoric release after the act is the reward for the risk taken. He feels good. It releases mood-altering Dopamine in the brain. All seems to be right with the world! So why would he not want to do it again? And again. And again.

I AM SIXTEEN, GOING ON SEVENTEEN

Now we come to the fork in the road. The lifetime crossdresser survived his childhood and escalated his crossdressing in a more sensual way as a teenager. As an adult, with freedoms — whether dressing in solitude or with others (other crossdressers, an accepting girlfriend) — the crossdressing male finds himself in a brand-new place.

I'm an adult! I have freedom! I can do what I want!

Many of us may continue to explore our gender duality as adults. Or, maybe, societal pressures forced you to put away your frivolous feminine thoughts in favor of adopting a more traditional male role. Maybe, crossdressing was truly just a phase of childish experimentation. Or, maybe, those feminine feelings eventually come back stronger.

If you continue in your exploration, examination and experimentation, you may struggle with your understood perception of your gender identity and sexual identity. Remember to revisit, from time to time, the Combination of Life from Chapter 2.1 as a way to find out how you see yourself at this very moment.

WHAT MAKES A MAN (OR WOMAN)?

Who am I? Am I truly a man? Or, am I woman trapped in a man's body? Gender dysphoria (or gender identity disorder) is a very real struggle for many transgender individuals. In my humble opinion, all men and women (cis and trans) face some form of gender dysphoria. Any feelings of the sort stems from established gender stereotypes, promoted gender aspirations and expectations, and still-rampant body shaming based on the first two criteria.

While cis-folks deal with the angst of general dysphoria set against a socially manufactured ideal for their biology, imagine the intensity of the anxiety, stress and depression trans-people experience as they battle the dysphoria of existing in a body in which they are not completely comfortable. I struggle with living up to both my masculine ideal and my feminine ideal [we will discuss more about dysphoria later in the book]. Without proper introspection, the uncertainty of knowing for sure what will make us feel complete as a physical person can be easily coupled with not understanding who we are attracted to.

LAWS OF ATTRACTION

If you want to dress as a woman you must want to be a woman, right? You must be sexually attracted to men, right?

Says who?

One of the biggest crossdressing myths to dispel is the following:

Because crossdressers desire to take on a female persona, they therefore need to take on all the traits of the feminine gender, including to switch their attraction to the opposite gender biology, from female to male.

Remember what we discussed in earlier chapters? Gender identity and biology exist as mutually exclusive components. A divide exists between gender identity and sexual orientation. Biology and sexuality have always been lumped together since male-to-female attraction IS imperative for the continuation of the species (as with all two-sex organisms). There is no argument that having children is important to keep us going into the future, but procreation is not the only reason we enjoy intimacy.

To believe the human mammal is the only species to engage in intimacy and sexual contact for pleasure is an outright lie, according to Dr. Glenn J. Scheyd, Jr. Ph.D. in an article from PsychologyToday.com[26]. If „lower“ animals can engage in sexual activity beyond the act of reproduction — and they don't have our reasoning ability, and were also created by God — why would it be assumed humans are any different.

The logic in your head would state, „IF women are attracted to men AND men who dress as women are trying to release their inner femininity, THEN men who like to dress as women must like men.“

There are a lot of assumptions in that single statement. Not all cis-women like men. Not all men who crossdress want to be intimate with men. Sure, some may pursue answers for both their gender and sexual identities at the same time. Some may eventually transition to something beyond their birth biology. But, even male-to-female transitioned women may continue to prefer women. The same could be said for non-transitioning crossdressing men. They could be completely content with periodic feminine dressing, but struggle with whether they are attracted to men, women, both or neither.

I am so confused! Ugh!

It is, in fact, confusing, dear reader. The reason why it is confusing is because we are steeped in the belief that our biology has everything to do with our sexual attraction. Remember, this information is just background for you to sift through until you get to your own truth. The truth will resonate loudly for you, once you discover it.

MERRIAM-WEBSTER

New gender- and sexuality-related terms are always popping up. It is difficult to keep up with each one, let alone figure out their true meaning or how they may even relate to you. Take, for example, Gender Nonconforming (GNC). It is a broad, encompassing phrase meant to include people with gender dysphoria. The term also describes individuals who are neither only male nor female.

Think about it.

A man or woman could have both masculine and feminine traits. Remember the little girl you played with as a neighborhood kid stuffing as much play in before the street lights came on? She loved to get muddy and could climb trees way better than you. She was considered a ‚tomboy'. In modern terms, she could be considered gender nonconforming (especially if she continued to exhibit strong masculine traits as she matured). Little girl tomboys are accepted in society. So, why are little boys who want to be ‚girlie' not?

[26] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sexual-positions/201309/onlyhumans-have-sex-pleasure

2.10. Crossdressing Late Bloomers

I've always been a late bloomer, so I never feel like, ‚Oh, I'm gettin' older; I guess everything is gonna stop.‘ I'm the opposite: ‚Oh, I'm just getting started.‘

~ Megan Mullally

LATE BLOOMERS: AN INTRODUCTION

You might think a male would know from an early age he wanted to dress in feminine attire, but that is, very often, not the case. Many men don't discover their feminine natures until adulthood. From the fear of reprisal forcing a suppression of their nature as an act of self-preservation, to simply not understanding an option existed for an overt feminine expression, there are many reasons why exploration may not occur until adulthood. There are also many triggers that could lead a man to realize dressing in a feminine manner makes him more comfortable, calm, and balanced.

One of my friends has a transgender son. While she and her husband raised their young then-daughter in a very gender-neutral way (toys, clothes, philosophy, etc.), it was not until his teenage years he realized his bisexual identity. The realization his female body was his incorrect gender — and wanting to transition to a male — did not occur until his early twenties. Was he still influenced by society, television, social media, and friends, to act in a specific way in spite of the freedom of gender expression promoted at home? Or, was the lack of a strict stereotypical gender upbringing — and the inherent need to rail against something that was uncomfortable — a detriment or retardant to him making his choices sooner?

Also, understand being a crossdresser does not mean you are, or were, secretly homosexual. It doesn't mean this discovery will lead to plans of transitioning to womanhood or the dissolving of your current relationship in search of something different. At the very least, as is my constant mantra, self-reflection is necessary.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

You are now faced with the very real prospect of what comes next. You can live a partially fulfilled life where the two sides of the same mind never meet beyond the shadows of solitude and secrecy. You can wait to be discovered and suffer the consequences, hoping for the best while expecting the worst. Or, you can share your authentic self with your partner, family, and friends — with the hope that understanding, support and love will rule the day.

I am not advocating you reveal yourself to others without thinking through the possible ramifications, dear crossdresser. You must weigh the decision very carefully. I cannot know enough to even begin to understand what has led you to this moment of contemplation.

Remember Galileo? He theorized the world was not the center of the universe and it, instead, traveled around the sun. By speaking out his truth concerning cosmic mechanics, Galileo was condemned to a lifetime of house arrest by the Roman Catholic Church. His words were considered heresy and he was admonished for them. He knew the risks of sharing his views and chose to live with those consequences. He lived with the truth, as he understood it.

I am over-simplifying the processes and the possible outcomes. But, sometimes placing a single *KISS* on the forehead of the issue — Keep It Simple, Sister — is the best course of action. And, maybe, my own story (coming up soon, I promise) will help you find some enlightenment. At the end of the day, all we have is our own hope, positivity, empathy, and the capacity to love ourselves and others. The rest is material... and immaterial.

We can't always get what we want, as Mick Jagger sang, but consider this... there are people in the world who will never have what we have right now. And, sometimes, what we have now is far better than we realize.

2.11. Binary and Non-Binary

Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.

~ Margaret Fuller

We pretend that the brain is binary, like a computer. But it's not. It's completely holographic.

~ Jim Harrison

DO I NEED AN UMBRELLA?

In recent years, several versions of another commonplace rainy-day accessory have tried to graphically depict the similarities and differences of transgender archetypes under a singular „umbrella". Imagine, if you will, one wide enough to keep you and a couple friends dry beneath it. You hold the handle while your friends crowd in close under its protection. Each has a placard around their neck with a title describing a category of transgender-ness. Be warned — the following section may make your head spin a little... or, a lot.

GOTTA LOVE A KILT

The Scottish Trans Alliance at the Scottishtrans.org website defines the Trans or Transgender Umbrella as having the following components: Cross-dressing people, Transsexual Women (male-to-female), Transsexual Men (female-to-male), and Trans Non-Binary People (a catch-all category for gender identities not exclusively masculine or feminine)[27]. In their model, Trans Non-Binary People are separated from Crossdressing People.

TRANSGENDER

Trans Non-Binary People	Transsexual Men (female to male)	Transsexual Women (male to female)	Crossdressing People.

I started you off with an easy one. The Scottish Trans Alliance kept their umbrella simple and very straightforward. Their descriptors are limited to gender identity and gender presentation, as opposed to mixing in sexual attraction and gender biology. From here, it's going to get a bit more complicated. But, I will be here to talk you through it (or, write you through it, I guess?).

THE LOVERS, THE DREAMERS, AND ME

Another transgender umbrella, created by Kerry Pointer from Duke University, and later modified by Carrie Dolan from the Virginia Department of Health in 2007 and by De Sube from the Rainbow Bridge Connection in 2009[28], states the graphic in a very contextual written way.

TRANSGENDER

[27] https://www.scottishtrans.org/trans-rights/an-intro-to-transterms/ transgender-umbrella/

[28] http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_DHqGp13VpV0/TUwbvj9Nk0I/AAAAAAAADdI/gHWBIXGzmmQ/s1600/Copy+of+transgender+umbrella.jpg

Transsexuals	Crossdressers	Performers	Intersex	Gender Benders

Because each person may have their own understanding of the categories listed above, I have provided for you below how the Virginia Department of Health and the Rainbow Bridge Connection described their graphic. I am re-writing their descriptions verbatim as to not inject my own bias onto it. They labeled the overarching category of Transgender as „an umbrella term for people whose anatomies and/or appearances do not conform to predominant gender roles. They have physical and/or behavioral characteristics readily identifying them as having a non-conforming gender identity. It can be someone of any sexual orientation."

So, that explains the main categorization of their specific Transgender umbrella and what we should expect as types of individuals under it. What comes next is their descriptors of the types of transgender individuals staying dry under its nylon canopy.

- „Transsexual – Born into one gender identity but psychologically and emotionally as the other. May be transitioning MTF or FTM. May experience Gender Dysphoria."
- „Crossdresser – Comfortable with their physical gender at birth, but will occasionally dress and take on the mannerisms of the opposite gender. Often heterosexual men."
- „Performers – Dress and act like the ‚opposite' sex for entertainment. For them, ‚drag' is a job or play. It is not an identity. Some are gay, some are not. Some identify as Transgender. Most do not."
- „Intersex – People born exhibiting some combination of both male and female genitalia. Often at birth, the attending physician and/or parents ‚choose' which gender to raise the child, necessitating surgery and/or hormonal treatment."
- „Gender Benders/Androgynes – Do not fit easily into the above categories as they may be constraining. May have a mix of male and female characteristics. Masculine ‚butch' lesbians, effeminate ‚queens' men and many gender expressions in between."

As you can see, a mix of gender biology, gender identity, and gender presentation are noted in the descriptions above. Should these mutually exclusive concepts be combined into one graphical representation when trying to encompass the spectrum of the transgender community as a whole? If so, aren't we also missing the gay and lesbian contingents?

READING ALL THE LABELS

Yet a third umbrella adapted from Josephine Tittsworth by Mel Reiff Hill[29] includes a plethora of labels under its Trans Gender Umbrella: Masculine Women, Androgynous Persons, Feminine Men, Hijra, Transsexuals (MtF, FtM), Two Spirit, Intersex Persons, Bigender, Third Gender, Eunichs, Drag Kings and Queens, Transvestites, Crossdressers, Intergender, Gender Queers, and Agendered.

Yeah. That list just happened.

I know your head is spinning with what all those labels could mean. As a crossdresser (or, transvestite, genderfluid, genderqueer, dual gender, bi-gender), it's imperative to recognize who YOU are. While understanding every LGBTQ+ community label helps you better

[29] http://thegenderbook.tumblr.com/post/41848208449/the-transgenderumbrella-page-from-the-gender

understand the fabulous fabric you may be cut from, it is still less critical than knowing how you personally thread into its tapestry.

THE TIES THAT BINARY

Some studies and „umbrella“ depictions focus on larger subgroups, while others try to put in as many inclusive labels as possible. One of the things each transgender umbrella did not sub-divide was the differences between binary and non-binary people.

The TransgenderTeenSurvivalGuide Tumblr site[30] presents a massive umbrella with a binary and non-binary umbrella under it. Trans-men and -women under the binary umbrella. Genderqueer, Demiboy, Demigirl, Neutrois, Genderfluid, Bigender, Agender, (and more) are denoted under the non-binary one.

While I understand the rationale for sub-dividing the transgender presentation into binary and non-binary umbrellas — and while I applaud the makers for graphically representing the nuances of the community — these umbrellas do not illustrate our individuality very well. The belief we can all be categorized under very specific and formalized singular labels glosses over the fact we are multifaceted and have different qualities epitomizing what makes us...us!

UNDER THE BIG TOP

So, what do I do? How do I define who I am? If there is no consensus or agreement on how I should label myself, how can I possibly do it on my own? I'm at a loss and you aren't giving me any answers! Ugh!

Welcome to the topsy-turvy circus of non-typical, non-linear genders and sexuality. The transgender ringmasters welcome you with open arms and a booming voice as you set foot under the heavy canvas flap of the big top tent! We have bearded ladies reflecting a genderqueer presence to the world, beautiful ballerinas epitomizing passable femininity as they gracefully ride powerful white stallions. Jugglers throw, into the air, three clubs of sexuality, one labeled for male, female, and both. Clowns, too, are clowning around — as they are want to do — in an exaggerated manner with an abundance of heavy makeup.

A rapt audience is in attendance. You can't have a three-ring spectacle without an audience, don't you know. Some of the men and women „ooh“ and „aah“ at the pageantry of the costumes and routines. Strangely, one of the rings has an outer arrow attached, the second ring is outlined with a cross along its outer edge, and the third with both the cross and the arrow.

The members of the transgender community are not under the lights to be applauded or to be watched for your enjoyment (unless you are watching a drag performance). Transmen are men, transwomen are women. The gender fluid crossdressers want to be accepted as men or women depending on their presentation. Genderqueer folk want the ability to blend their gender presentation into a varying amalgam of masculinity and femininity.

---

[30] https://transgenderteensurvivalguide.tumblr.com/post/174004961680/leesays-the-word-transgender-is-an-umbrella

If women can wear jeans and a flannel shirt, and sport a close-cropped hairstyle without judgement, why can't a man with longer hair wear androgynous fashions and a bit of lip gloss? Oh, such is the influence of a patriarchy...

ONES AND ZEROES

Beyond all of the simplistic metaphors, analogies and abject storytelling in this chapter, the concept of binary and non-binary genders may sound complicated and unknowable. The concepts are fairly simple. Gender binarism (the gender binary) is the classification of gender into two distinct and opposite forms — masculinity and femininity. You are either black or white, off or on, a one or a zero. You are either masculine or feminine — two points on the graph without any connectivity between them.

Gender non-binarism serves as a bucket for all gender identities defined between the posts of masculine and feminine. The trans-community lives in the shades of gray between those black-and-white posts. A man who wears artsy scarfs and writes poetry strays from the masculine post. A girl who climbs trees and splashes around in the boggy mud strays from the feminine post. Both physical and behavioral gender „normality" constitute masculine and feminine ideals. Everything else falls into gender fluidity.

Genderqueer[31] is an adjective referring to people who transgress the accepted gender ideals. They do not conform to either established gender identity all the time. Androgynously-gendered people blend a mix of both genders or may become more ambiguous in their presentations. Agender people are those who operate without a personal concept of gender, sometimes adopting alternate pronouns to best describe themselves.

Facebook, in 2014, adopted fifty profile gender types for their clients to select from in terms of defining their gender[32]. For most people (cis-people, in particular), this change would mean nothing. But, many who see themselves most comfortable as an alternative gender preferred the new descriptors which were more in line with who they were. The last thing they wanted is to be identified as — or reminded of being — was someone they are not. Below is the list of 50 gender options in full (at that time):

Agender
Androgyne
Androgynes
Androgynous
Bigender
Cis
Cis Female
Cis Male
Cis Man
Cis Woman

[31] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genderqueer

[32] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/10637968/Facebook-sexchanges-which-one-of-50-genders-are-you.html

Cisgender
Cisgender Female
Cisgender Male
Cisgender Man
Cisgender Woman
Female to Male
FTM
Gender Fluid
Gender Nonconforming
Gender Questioning
Gender Variant
Genderqueer
Intersex
Male to Female
MTF
Neither
Neutrois
Non-binary
Other
Pangender
Trans
Trans Female
Trans Male
Trans Man
Trans Person
Trans*Female
Trans*Male
Trans*Man
Trans*Person
Trans*Woman
Transexual
Transexual Female
Transexual Male
Transexual Man
Transexual Person
Transexual Woman
Transgender Female
Transgender Person
Transmasculine
Two-spirit

AS YOU CAN SEE FROM the extensive list above, Facebook faced a growing concern that human beings are not content to simply be corralled into the classifications of only „male“ or „female“. Many of the choices overlap or seem synonymous — so the list is not as daunting as it may seem at first glance. Facebook went to the Nth degree to be inclusive. While the ability to select „Other“, „Choose not to answer“, or „Non-binary“ exists on many websites, those who identity beyond male or female wonder why gender is still a requirement on profiles or documents, at all... but that is a discussion for another time.

DOING THE MATH

The typical man or woman is comfortable in their skins and with their birth biology. The thought of whether they are gender binary or non-binary has never entered their mind. Their gender binary-ness is as inherent as their understanding that they are homo sapiens. The fact that labels are becoming popularized for non-binary people forces „normal folk“ to take on labels they did not realized existed for them.

A woman who loves to rock climb or a man who loves to bake cookies is still gender binary. Having a more masculine- or feminine-perceived flair does not exclude one from the binary. If, on the other hand, you have distinctive identity beyond your biology — either an amalgam of masculine and feminine or exclusivity from each — you may be considered gender non-binary.

For Your Consideration~

After much research and introspection, I have flip-flopped on how I see myself on the gender binary/non-binary scale. I thought that because I am a crossdresser I was gender non-binary. It seemed to make sense... I am a man who has a very articulated and developed feminine side. I figured the concept made me non-binary. But, in reality, I still present as either masculine or feminine, not truly a gender-fluid version of both at the same time.

Sure, I wear decidedly feminine underwear every day and add a colorful scarf to my ensemble when the weather calls for it. But, otherwise, I present as male. When I „become” Savannah, she presents as female (not ever in a partial presentation). So, in truth, I operate under the two tent poles of the gender spectrum, not skirting fully into the middle of the spectrum in-between the poles. Therefore, I flirted with the notion that maybe I was gender fluid, as well as gender binary.

The „aha“ moment of the investigation came with the reading of the definition of gender non-binary as it describes a person as one who does not exclusively identify as male or female[33]. At the end of the day, I fall into a bi-gender or dual gender identification. Since, I am not exclusive masculine or feminine — regardless of presenting myself outwardly as exclusively masculine or feminine at any one time — I still find myself in the gender non-binary.

[33] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-binary_gender

So many labels! Am I right?

2.12. Savannah's Story

A man's face is his autobiography. A woman's face is her work of fiction.

~ Oscar Wilde

I'm writing an unauthorized autobiography.

~ Steven Wright

ONCE UPON A TIME

It seems most appropriate to write about my life as if it were a fairy tale. I mean, there is a beautiful (ahem) princess trapped in a castle who, even if rescued or manages to escape, faces the wrath of most of the villagers and royalty of the kingdom, alike. Are there dragons? Only if you count drag-ons! Is there a knight in shining armor? In fact, several have rescued Savannah from the evils men (and women) do. It is a tale spanning the ages and thousands of miles. Riveting adventures from childhood to adulthood, filled with self-discovery and enlightenment.

Oh, enough!

Maybe I should have the Star Wars Long, long ago, in a galaxy far away... prologue crawl to give you all the backstory? Nah. That wouldn't cover what I feel I need to tell you, either. To tell you my story, I've broken the major milestones and anecdotes into a series of vignettes, illustrating my journey to date and my hopes for the future.

HERE GOES EVERYTHING

„I was born a poor black child. I remember the days, sittin' on the porch with my family..." Wait... sorry... that was Steve Martin's Navin R. Johnson character from the 1979 movie, *The Jerk*.

Anyway, my childhood upbringing was nothing special or extraordinary, except to say it was extraordinary in its ordinariness. I was born in 1971 in Detroit, Michigan to blue-collar lower/middle-class parents, with a sister two-years-older than me, and eventually a little brother born four years after me. Yes, I was the middle child — the forgotten child — who, stereotypically, tends to disappear from the family dynamic.

I was shy and introverted around new people. That being said, I played with the other kids on the close-knit dead-end block, enjoying my suburban life. Back then, we stayed outside from sun up to sundown during the summer. Only the street lights coming on at dusk or my name being called for dinner instantly interrupted our play.

As a little kid, I never imagined my life as anything outside *normal*. Until one fateful day where my curiosity about the feminine clothes I saw my mother fold and put away got the better of me. I don't rightly recall the exact age or date but I would put the first quest at roughly the age of five or six. I cannot recall why I was so drawn to her clothing or wanted to try them on. I don't know why I wanted to wad up face towels or socks to fill out the cups so the shape was more like my mom. Why did her white bras fascinate me? Was it the shimmer of the material or the hints of lace?

I continued to sneak a peek at my mom's clothes as often as it was safe to do so. It just felt right. What did not feel right was knowing I was being bad. Not because of the act of dressing in my mom's bra and girdle — and sometimes those black patent two inch heels I never saw her wear — but because I knew I was trespassing into her room and belongings.

I understood the ground rules of privacy and personal space, and why they were put into place. My dad had rifles stored under the bed and in the closet. Even with the inherent draw a young boy feels for guns, I really had no interest in handling them. I had enough fear and respect to know to leave them alone.

All that being said, while I knew it was wrong to sneak into my parents' and sister's rooms, I never felt the act of dressing was wrong. It seemed natural. Between the two, I was more worried about the consequence of the trespassing than getting caught crossdressing.

GROWING PAINS

This went on through my formative teenage years. My raging hormones mingled with my dressing, progressing my secret dressing from a sense of comfort to one more for visual fantasy and self-exploration. I loved the femininity in the mirror, curious what it would be like to experience life as a girl.

You know the old saying? „If I had boobs, I would be playing with them all day." That silly statement aptly explains how it felt. I wished I had breasts to fill out the bra I was wearing. *Why?* Because stuffing the bra with socks seemed like cheating. It didn't do anything to help me understand my feminine side. I could see something vaguely feminine in the mirror (if I squinted hard enough), knowing in my heart a gender divide existed.

Sears Roebuck used to have a massive direct mail catalog where you could buy almost anything — from clothing and tools to sailboats and pre-fabricated houses! I gazed at the female models in their undergarments, wanting to emulate them. I realize now I always had an undeniable appreciation of the female form. It is a feminine perfection I continue to strive for in my crossdressing presentation. As a teenager, trying lipstick was as far into the makeup application as I dared to venture. If I stared only at my lips, I could ignore the rest of my obviously masculine face. The red lips made the dressing feel a little more complete. The teenage years brought with them my sister's pantyhose, underwear, bathing suits and leotards.

BAM! POW!

At that age, I also seriously started reading comics. Who were my favorite characters? I liked Batman, Spider-man and the Flash, but I loved Wonder Woman and the Black Canary. I even tried on my sister's pantyhose and black bathing suit in an effort to recreate Black Canary's look — sans boots, choker, bolero jacket, and blond hair. I thought I would never be able to replicate Wonder Woman's look (I still feel the way), especially after Lynda Carter epitomized the character in such an amazing and iconic fashion. So, even before I knew the term, I had unknowingly had my first attempt at cosplay.

Nothing more notable occurred during those years before high school. Well, that's not necessarily true. I can recall an instance where I was almost caught in the act. I had borrowed

my sister's bikini bottoms and worn it under my clothes. When going to return them to my sister's room, I realized my mom could see me (from her own bedroom). I diverted to my bedroom and stuffed the bathing suit bottoms into my sock drawer. It was a fruitless attempt at secrecy as my mom came in and demanded to know what I was doing. I showed her the bikini bottoms and explained it away as a prank.

Did she believe you?

I thought she did. Her reaction to seeing me with my sister's bikini bottoms was the comment, „Do you want people to think you're gay?". Of course, my mom also accused me of being a smoker after finding damp sawdust in my winter jacket pocket (I had worked with my dad on a carpentry side job). At any rate, I re-doubled my efforts to keep my activities hidden.

In high school, I did have a few girlfriends. In my senior year, I became sexually active. I had shared my crossdressing with one particular girlfriend. I was elated to find out she was open to encounters where one, or both of us, wore lingerie. It was a confidence-building watershed moment for me, experiencing feelings of acceptance.

LIFE HAPPENS

High school turned into college, school projects, and a full-time job. The university was a commuting college, so I continued to live at home and missed out on opportunities for continued gender-discovery. I had created a self-imposed exile of my feminine self, and pressed on to do all the things that a young adult was expected to do.

I met and moved in with the woman who would become my wife (sorry, spoiler alert!). She was not initially receptive to the idea of my crossdressing, so my internal growth continued to be stunted. The responsibilities of my university studies and paying the bills filled that vacuum with plenty of distraction. But, regardless of the circumstances, the want to crossdress never went away.

Eventually, I somehow secured a few crossdress concessions from her (I don't remember how). I periodically wore a teddy to bed and she agreed to a single intimate interlude where I dressed in lingerie, makeup, and a wig. I had high hopes as to how the experience would play out, assuming my wife's agreement was wholehearted. In the end, it ended up being awkward and unfulfilling. My want was too much and hers was too little. As a result, my desire for acceptance was dashed and my self-confidence waned. I was, again, reminded my wife was not supportive of my feminine identity or pursuits.

START SPREADING THE NEWS

My wife and I began a photography and graphic design business, succeeding in the Detroit Tri-County area for a year. Unfortunately, a downturn in the economy and our inexperience in marketing forced us to look elsewhere for employment — in a different state of the union altogether. In 1995, we moved to the Big Apple, sharing a studio apartment in Manhattan's upper east side for another year with my wife's brother, his girlfriend, and their baby. You guessed it... not too many opportunities to dress.

We worked our 9-to-5s. We enjoyed the company of our family. We took advantage of the sights and sounds of the city. And, after a year, my wife and I had saved enough to get our

own apartment. Had I been unhappy during those months? It is hard to recall, but I do remember periodically think about dressing. I knew going in that opportunities to dress would be scarce, so I had braced for that reality. I worked hard and focused on what I could do.

Our own apartment brought with it the return of privacy and the ability to give a sharper focus to my feminine side. I bought new panties and started to wear them under my male clothes. After the twelve-month drought, I finally felt closer to complete again.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

A new milestone came with an unexpected conversation on the return leg to New York on a Michigan Thanksgiving road trip. My wife suddenly revealed to me that she and a co-worker had been having talking about experimenting with lesbianism. I was shocked about her wanting to explore an alternative sexuality, especially after hearing stories of how disgusted she had been after being hit on by other women. She had also been crushed by a high school sweetheart who had, during their relationship, realized he was gay. So, hearing this revelation was mind blowing, to say the least.

I listened to her plan, not really having a choice since I was driving 70 MPH on the Interstate. I am not saying I was completely onboard with the idea of my wife going outside of our marriage, but I understood enough about my own gender struggles to realize the importance of her need for self-discovery. She said she would allow me crossdressing freedoms if I agreed to her plan. She had dangled a crossdressing carrot in exchange for my consent, and I was more than happy to oblige.

Another upside to the new dynamic was that my wife's girlfriend took an interest in my feminine development. She helped to pick out clothes, gave me pointers for comportment, and showed me how to dance in a more feminine way. Another of my wife's co-workers — an openly lesbian woman named Johanna — gave me my first full makeover. Her and her own girlfriend became instrumental in raising my confidence when in a full feminine guise. While my wife was otherwise engaged with her new girlfriend, I had the support of my first den mothers as we went out to nightclubs in Queens and Manhattan.

It was a heady time in my life as Savannah. I was out in public in full makeup for the first time. I had the support of new friends. I was accepted and allowed to flourish. My den mothers were fearless and their confidence bled off onto me. I felt like I belonged, even though it within the protective bubble of LGBT friends with alternative sexual preferences and under the cover of the New York City clubbing nightlife.

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Speaking of sexuality...

During Savannah's roaring 1990s, several things occurred. I accepted who I was as a transvestite, as far as I understood the label to entail. I struggled with my sexual identity due to being thrown into situations where sexual attraction was no longer simply black-and-white. Last, but not least, I discovered my name and personal persona.

This was the first time I had accepted the label of transvestite. Back in those days, the term of crossdresser had not yet replaced the more clinical TV moniker. I spoke the words out

loud to a co-worker who gave me a lift home to Manhattan one night. I was proud of who I was becoming and wanted to proclaim it proudly. Yeah, I was still pretty dumb, but lucky enough to tell people who were very supportive and open-minded.

I even sent a letter to my sister. It included a photo of me dressed as Savannah with a note to call me. Back in those days, the Internet was still in its infancy and I had to resort to the old-school snail mail method of paper, pen and film to come out to my sibling. Although she didn't understand what it all meant (I didn't, at the time, either), she and her husband were both very supportive. I thanked them for that act of kindness. I still have their wonderful typewritten responses in a four-page letter (to be revealed to you later!).

As a transvestite, I made the strange and assumptive leap that I must also be homosexual. Even though I always loved cis-women, I fell into the same traps of misconception as many others. To better illustrate my point, one night my wife and I accompanied her co-workers to a bar and restaurant called Lucky Cheng's for one of her co-worker's birthday. The staff and entertainers working there were all drag queens and transvestites. They were gorgeous. I was very attracted to them. So, the idea was reinforced that I must be gay (because I knew they were men underneath the makeup and dresses), even though I wasn't attracted to men presenting as men. I finally realized that, for me, it was okay to be attracted to a man dressed as a woman.

Why?

Those crossdressing men represented what I have always found so attractive about women, perfecting their feminine art form. It was the inherent feminine undercurrents these men possess, both in mannerism, form and personality which appeals to me. And... those drag queens had plenty of femininity to go around.

Some may say I am just following God's Grand Design with my attraction to the opposite of the species — even if the woman is actually a man in drag. I shrug at the notion. I don't understand the human rules of attraction, especially since those attractions are not absolutes for us as a species.

SAY MY NAME, SAY MY NAME

And as a grand finale, I discovered my name. Like the genesis of any good stripper or drag queen title, I first tried to use the formula of my first pet's name, plus the street where I grew up. Well, I surely wasn't going to answer to the name Shaggy.

And, don't call me Shirley.

I wanted something exotic, but accessible. I wanted something that didn't sound like a stripper moniker or used an „i" in place of a „y". I didn't want a spinster name. In short, I didn't have any ideas. My den mothers, my wife, and her girlfriend threw out ideas, but none sounded right. Then, unceremoniously and in a blink of thought, the name „Savannah" came out of the southern blue sky. It ticked all the checkboxes and I instantly fell in love with it. I was finally Savannah, the name representing my female identity. It completed me as a person, even if I still had years to go to perfect my presentation and confidence.

TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGING

I had discovered much about myself, accepting and declaring — in a figuratively loud voice — my label of transvestite. I gave myself a feminine name. I better understood my gender identity and reaffirmed my sexual identity.

At the same time, my wife had come into her own with the revelation that she was, indeed, a lesbian. I was happy for her discovery, but knew I couldn't exist in a marriage in name only. The guise of intimacy was not the real thing. It would have eventually broken my heart if I had continued in the relationship making believe we were still loving partners to those around us.

We agreed to divorce. That decision, however, was not the price to be paid. It was the smartest option, so we could both move on with our individual pursuits of happiness. I moved to Queens, New York, to be closer to my job and to cut down on the cost of rent. I became involved with another woman, hopeful that her immediate knowledge of my feminine self would create a more balanced relationship. And, it was good. She was fine with my dressing (she had been told about me before I could tell her). She went out to the same friendly clubs I was familiar with. Savannah was accepted.

PECULIAR AND PECULIERER

Around that time, another of my female co-workers confided in me her own boyfriend crossdressed. I was stunned to finally find someone more like me — not a professional drag queen — associated with a someone I worked with. We made plans to go clubbing on Steinway Street in Astoria. I knew what drag queens were and some of the other fetish factions, but my co-worker's boyfriend was a crossdressing type I had not encountered before.

When they came over to our apartment I met them in the lobby, fully dressed. My co-worker looked ready for the club but the boyfriend was still in male-mode. We went upstairs. He changed into a LBD (little black dress), hose, and heels... period.

I was confused. No makeup, no jewelry, no wig. I could not wrap my brain around it. But, if that was his preference, who was I to judge him? Heck, I was dressed in my own LBD and fully decked out *en-femme*.

Once we got into the club, we danced, drank and had a good time. Then, after a couple hours, the boyfriend went to the bathroom and returned with his male clothes on. I was confused, again. Why would he go through the effort to dress, only to change back halfway through the night? It was a wig scratcher, for sure. The thought has stuck with me ever since.

RELAX, JUST DO IT

On another topic of self-discovery, my girlfriend may have been worldlier and more in tune than I was. One evening, I had come home from work very stressed. She told me she thought dressing would make me feel better. She was right. The feel of the material through my fingers and the way the clothing caressed my body relaxed me. It took some time for the stress to bleed off, but spending the evening in feminine attire allowed me to focus on something other than work.

So, all was right with the world. My girlfriend was supportive of Savannah. I had discovered an early form of balance between my male and female personas, and my

confidence as Savannah was growing. In spite of all these positive advances, life continued to change without my permission.

BACK DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

The relationship did not work out. Not because of my two halves, but because of hers.

What the heck? I thought she was a cis-woman?

I assure you she was (and still is) a real woman, folks. In our case, she was struggling with her own identity. Not a crisis of gender identity, but a racial one. She was born of an Irish mother and an African American father. Due to a breakdown of her nuclear family dynamic, her Irish grandparents raised her. She felt ostracized by both races — not African American nor Irish enough to feel accepted.

I was still recovering from the drama of my divorce — and focused on my own dual gender development — to fully appreciate what she was dealing with. I hadn't matured enough to be with her in a positive and supportive way. So, yet again, I moved on. We both moved on. Such is the way of love and relationships... and life. And, hopefully, each experience impacts us enough to allow us to see the world in a different way.

NO SLEEP 'TIL BROOKLYN

Because I spent so much time at the office, I eventually dated another co-worker. She was smart, focused, strong, and free of drama — just what I needed. As with my previous girlfriend, I sat down with her after work one day and showed her a photo of me as Savannah. I wanted all the cards on the table. If she was not ready for the idea of being with a crossdresser, I would rather have loved and lost early versus later.

I was pleasantly surprised she was okay with it. She was definitely a graduate of the old school, but being raised in NYC allowed for her to have more exposure to what crossdressing was. We eventually moved in together and the relationship flourished — as they typically do in the blissful honeymoon phase. Why is it a phase? Why can't it be for always? Anyway, I digress. I showed her Savannah's clothes and shoes. She even tried on some of my dresses. It was novel for her, something new and interesting.

But she and Savannah did not go out to the dance clubs, or even out to dinner. I understood that wasn't her scene. She was older and past adolescent partying, having raised two kids by herself — working fulltime — after her own divorce. I was attracted to her determination and no-nonsense attitude.

We were together for fifteen years, so I will not bore you with the minutia of each and every year. Over the years we saved up enough to buy a house, marriage was proposed (although we never followed through), we had several dogs running around the house, continued to work together in the same office, and took in her daughter's family for a time.

During those years, after the novelty of my crossdressing seemed to have worn off, I felt she had become more disapproving of my female side. Each time I dressed up at home (no makeup, no wig), her reactions evolved from a sideways glance and disinterest to an eventual eye roll.

To let you in on a little secret, I am a very sensitive individual. I tend to take things personally. I am fairly empathic and can feel how people feel. Where the ability has a chink in its armor was in how it could misread the reasons behind those reactions. I have worked hard to disassociate emotions and baggage from my empathy, and, I guess, I am now more enlightened. In those days, though, her reactions toward Savannah were growing reminders of the support I had lost.

THE GREAT PUMPKIN

One glaring example of her disapproval occurred one weekend during Halloween. Yep, Halloween. We shared a co-op in in Northern New Jersey. The property had a lake, two pools, and a rec center. A costume party had been organized by the planning committee. My girlfriend and I had been together for seven years at that point, if memory serves.

I was excited to dress as a China girl — buying the dress in Manhattan's Chinatown, getting sandals and the straight jet-black wig with bangs. Although my girlfriend was aware of my costume, she became more and more detached about it. I tried to ignore her bad vibes and focused on preparing for the evening. When I was ready to leave for the other side of the lake, she told me she didn't want to show up with me to the party.

I was devastated, close to just taking everything off and avoiding the whole event. Instead, I soldiered on. I went early to the party (because I am a stickler for promptness and wanted to get away from my girlfriend's bad energy). When my leg-casted friend arrived (not a costume), I helped her out of her car and was delighted she didn't recognize me. When she did finally realize who I was under the makeup, she was all smiles and support about my bold choice.

The other women at the party enjoyed me and my costume, as well. Maybe, they thought it was brave a man would show a feminine side (because their husbands wouldn't dare to try it). Maybe, they thought I looked convincing. Maybe, it was just because they liked me as a person. The men were a different story.

The men's reactions fell into three camps. The first was typical good-natured masculine razzing after seeing another man in drag. They played it off as parody and didn't act any different around me beyond the teasing. The second reaction was something more of avoidance. They seemed to be unsure how to take me. Was it a matter of homophobia? Or, was it a subconscious vague attraction or appreciation they couldn't rationalize? It was hard to know for sure. Throughout the night, they would wander away when I injected myself into their circle of conversation, even if their friends and spouses were in the throes of a good chat. Finally, the last reaction was one drinking men don't remember the next day. One man, in particular, put his arm around me or patted me on my ass several times throughout the evening. He would lean in close, invading my personal space, and tell me a slurred and unintelligible secret truth or desire. The more drinks he consumed, the more pretty he promised I was.

What happened to your girlfriend? Did she show up?

Yes. She arrived an hour into the party. I was relieved. I had started to worry. Still, she avoided me. What I finally realized — years later — was that she had been struggling. She had not been ready to be seen with me in public parading around as a woman — even as a costume — because she knew it was my truth. And, I suspect, that thought everyone else would suspect it as my truth, too. She was worried for my safety and reputation, not wanting people to whisper about the type of person they thought I might be.

Toward the end of the night, I quietly argued with her about how she was acting and about whether she was going to leave early (even though I was having a good time, otherwise). The next day, we should have discussed the situation in further detail, but we didn't. The lack of synergy between us in understanding Savannah in our relationship was becoming painfully evident. What started out as a novelty and curiosity on her part, became a barbed element that started to dig in and twist up the relationship.

The party was the first of many situations where my girlfriend's adverse reactions began to weigh on my mind. If she was unable to accept me in my dual genders, then the logical conclusion was that I was most likely the freak I already feared and assumed everyone thought I was. How could I be confident and feel accepted if the one person whom I assumed most intimately loved me was unable to see past the taboo and fetish she believed my crossdressing represented?

FROM MIND CLOSET TO COAT CLOSET

In 2009, I realized I needed more for Savannah. The chains that had kept her immobile and miserable in the closet at home had become unbearable. A vague despair had eroded my normally upbeat nature. My positivity was the only thing allowing me to continue for as long as I had.

Savannah had become something to be ashamed of. My partner had rejected me... so why should I continue to naively believe I was normal? It had been a slow — almost imperceptible — descent back into the closet. Savannah had come out at home less and less, not wanting to subject myself willingly to more rejection. Resentment started to build up. I directed it toward my partner for her lack of support. I buried the rest inward for allowing myself to be led back into the closet. I had forgotten the most important thing — that I was the only one who could live my life.

Eventually, I think the recognition of finding myself in the darkness of the closet led me to the rediscovery of a sliver of courage. I made an appointment for a professional makeover at Long Island's Femme Fever, arriving to a studio full of clothes, wigs and heels. I had brought some of my own things, as well, and I spent a few hours with someone who understood and accepted to my feminine side. Different looks were whipped up, allowing me to explore the woman within through fashion and photography. Although I mostly saw my male-ness, a few of the photos captured a flash of femininity. For those couple of hours, I felt complete.

Then, I returned to reality.

Well, except the reality I returned to had changed. I still dressed in secret at home, but something had started to brighten within me. I still couldn't bring myself to discuss my needs

with my girlfriend, but I started finding the truth and confidence within me. It wasn't until a year later — when my girlfriend went out of town to visit her sister — that I returned to Femme Fever for another makeover.

The second appointment was even better than the first. Receiving such acceptance and validation did wonders for my self-acceptance. Afterward, I stopped making excuses. I faced the fear of my girlfriend's possible disapproval and — upon her return — told her I wanted to go to one of Femme Fever's monthly discussion groups. Her answer was, simply, „Okay."

At the next Femme Fever discussion group, I found my confidence wane. Nervousness became the emotion of the evening as I struggled with being Savannah around other crossdressers. In truth, I think most of us were nervous. Quickly, though, we all warmed up enough to interact. When the discussion group began in the den, we sat on comfy couches and told our stories, in turn. With each tale, I focused on the elements of their biography that resonated to me. These stories proved I was not utterly alone in the universe, and made me realize I no longer suffered from terminal uniqueness.

OPEN 24 HOURS

I became close friends with several of the group's crossdressers over the following months. After I became comfortable applying my own makeup, I would get dressed at home before driving to the meetings — of course, always rushing to arrive on time.

One time, I forgot to stop at an ATM for the session due fee. A couple of the other gurls (in this slang, the „u" is to distinguish us from cis-women) offered to pay my way. I was very appreciative, and made it a point tell them I would immediately go to a 7-Eleven ATM afterward to repay them. It became a running joke that I would soon have to face the mini-mart's harsh white fluorescent lights.

And it happened. Two of the gurls, Victoria and Marisol, drove in a convoy with me to find a 7-Eleven close to a TG-friendly bar we had intended to check out. The bar had closed down indefinitely (without notice), but the 7-Eleven had not. Victoria and I ventured from our cars to the front door. An older woman held the door for us. I offered her a nervous smile and a hushed ‚thank you'. Victoria got something to drink and I withdrew the cash I needed. The cashiers looked at Victoria (she was wearing a plaid skirt and thigh high boots), smiling and telling us to come again.

We made our way back to the parking lot where I could breathe again and repay Marisol. It was then I realized the fears I had let pile up over the past few years had been unrealized and unrealistic. Angry mobs hadn't materialized with pitchforks and torches. I wasn't pointed out as a freak or an undesirable. I was just another person living in the world.

From that moment on, I didn't look back in fear of being Savannah. My friends and I would go out to bars, dance clubs, and restaurants. We enjoyed our sorority, basking in the knowledge that we were entitled to express our feminine sides.

My relationship with my girlfriend did not work out. Some of it stemmed from my revelations concerning Savannah and what I needed out of life and from my partner. Some of it was due to a new family dynamic I wasn't prepared to be part of. Some of it was the decay

of a relationship too broken to be fixed. I had a lot to do with why the relationship ended, knowing I made assumptions about her feelings and not communicating my own needs to her. I wasn't ready for the commitments she had made, in those last two years, for others in her life who she loved unconditionally.

Regardless, we continued to work together in the same office, eventually returning to a point in our social relationship where we did not harbor animosity about the past — both of us able to look forward to our individual futures.

TO BOLDLY GO

I met another woman, Jen, at work. Yes, I know, it seems to be where I meet all of my girlfriends — sorry, it's where I spend the majority of my adult life! I should probably do something about finding some outside interests! We did not really get to know each other during the first year working in the same office... I really only saw her in the hallways. But, one day, another co-worker and I told her she should watch „The Walking Dead". She eventually did and we playfully argued about the merits of Rick Grimes as a good or bad character.

Our friendship grew little by little. After she finished reading the first fictional novel I had published, she was very interested in discussing it. Then, she showed up to my first book signing. I was very pleased that she had come. After the book signing, she and I had an opportunity to get to know each other on a more personal level.

When that actual moment occurred — the realization Jen and I could become something more together — I had to stop what we were doing, lead her to the couch, and fumble through my smartphone with the comment of, „...something I have to show you." I tapped on a picture of Savannah and turned the screen toward her. She replied with, „Yeah, that's you at the office Halloween party." I had to explain it wasn't just a costume... that the woman she saw in the picture, Savannah, was part of me.

Jen's response was that of a deer caught in headlights. How does one react to such news, especially when they are completely unfamiliar with crossdressing and how it would affect a *normal* relationship? Needless to say, it was touch-and-go for a few weeks as she asked me questions, took council from a friend who had experienced her own destructive relationship with a fetish crossdresser, and did Google searches to educating herself more about the trans world.

Now, over five years later, we have a better understanding of how Savannah fits into a relationship and the world. There are still fears to be overcome and obstacles to be hurdled, as Savannah continues to evolve.

OBSTACLE COURSE

Remember when I said, „From that moment on, I didn't look back in fear of being Savannah" just a few pages ago? Yeah, that statement was a lie. Yes, I had discovered a newfound courage for Savannah, surrounding myself with members of the local Long Island crossdressing community. Yes, I had fallen into a positive and balanced routine for my feminine persona where I was getting out a few times a month. But, courage is a very delicate thing — always fleeting at the most inopportune moment.

When Jen and I made the decision to move out of New York State for financial reasons (code for „not being able to afford the New York City lifestyle“), my immediate concern steered to the question of how Savannah was going to survive in the southern climes. I mean, I was planning to move to the notorious capital-letter South where every pickup came with a loaded gun rack, a Confederate Flag and a Bible in the glovebox. Where was Savannah going to find a crossdressing community in the great Upstate of South Carolina. I even had to move to a state with „South“ in the title!

Jen and I first set up shop in a short-term lease apartment. My work was with the same company, so changing desks was not overly traumatic or jarring. But, with any long-distance move, the new environment and inherent uncertainties quickly took their toll. I had been looking online for other crossdressers in the Carolinas for weeks before leaving New York, without having much success. It eventually got so bad that Jen would sit with me on the apartment's patio, dancing her thumbs across the screen of her own smartphone, looking for sites dedicated to the transgender or crossdressing communities. She even looked at fetish dating sites, searching for any opportunity for me to connect with others like me.

The more time that passed without successfully connecting with someone, the more despondent I became. I wasn't only depressed as Savannah, but as a whole. Savannah is integral to my complete sense of self. With Savannah's public outlet prospects dwindling, I wondered if she would be forever trapped inside home. Would she ever be able to again peek outside into the scary gun-toting and religiously intolerant world to which she had decided to relocate.

The loss of the safety of a CD-friendly community and my own semi-founded worries of public intolerance led Savannah to, again, fear the unknown. All of the self-confidence and „don't give a damn“ New York-fostered and -developed attitude had disappeared. The joke Jen had made about Savannah having to browse the aisles of the local Walmart (if I didn't find others to go out with) was becoming more of a reality than I had cared to imagine.

BEACON OF LIGHT

I finally did locate another novice crossdresser online and met her at her apartment. The simple act of being in the parking lot in my apartment complex built up my confidence a few notches. When I stepped outside my door, the expected hail of bullets and the admonishing mob of Bible-thumpers did not materialize. I felt the same feeling when I got out of my car at her apartment complex. All of my unrealistic fears suddenly felt very transparent. She, herself, was sweet woman, very novice and more closeted than I felt. She looked up to me as if I was so much more accomplished and brave than her. It was a strange feeling to have someone think I was so brave... especially when I didn't believe it completely for myself.

But, I was starting to believe.

Eventually, I responded to an LGBTQ+ Meetup app „Monthly Mingle“ group and was lucky enough to meet people who represented many facets of the LGBTQ+ spectrum. I might not have discovered an established and flourishing crossdressers community, but I was lucky enough to connect with people who had their own stories to share. I learned more about their

life experiences and aspirations. As a result, I felt I had become a larger part of the wider LGBTQ+ community.

For Your Consideration ~

So, I guess, the point of the story is we are only hindered by our own skewed and unsubstantiated beliefs. We tend to fan the flames of our own fears, forgetting the world can be more accepting than we give it credit. My return to fear was a result of my loss of self-confidence and a worry I would never recapture what I had left behind in New York.

The reality is that wonderful people live in the great state of South Carolina, each with their own richly textured story. The truth is that the confidence I thought I had lost had been buried within me all along. I just had to see a sliver of the light of day so it could again strengthen and galvanize. So, our confidence could be compared to Dorothy's ruby slippers. In the end, we had the ability to go back to Kansas the entire time... we just had to believe.

FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS (A.K.A. CLOSET-GATE)

Jen gives Savannah plenty of support. She understands my feminine persona is not a part of myself that will suddenly going away. But, don't think for a second I live an idyllic life without conflict. We still have altercations about how Savannah fits into the tapestry of our lives.

When I think back on these heated situations, they seem very banal on the surface. But, as trivial as they seem, the emotions stirred up as a result are real and palpable. For example, when we finally closed on our house, we had to move all of our stuff again after only a few short months. I wanted to put all of my dresses in the guest bedroom closet because the hanger bar was higher. Jen wanted them hung up somewhere where people would not stumble across them and force her to have to explain their existence.

I put the dresses in the guest bedroom closet, anyway. A few days later, after coming home from work, I realized Jen had moved them. It only took a moment for the emotional dam of negative emotions to crack open in my brain. The questioning spiraled out of control in an instant. Why did she move the dresses without getting my okay? *Why was it so difficult to defend why there were so many dresses in the closet to start with? Why was Jen so ashamed of Savannah — and, by extension, me as a whole person?* Yep. That was the blast of fragmented thoughts filling my brain. The flood of feelings is difficult to articulate. The years of secrecy and non-acceptance exploded into a crushing emotional weight. Tempering my reaction or tamping them back down with logic or reason wasn't going to be effective or immediate. Emotions are funny that way, aren't they?

So, as is typical in my adverse reactions, I shut down. I became passive aggressive and avoided Jen, giving her the silent treatment as a punitive response to her shame of Savannah and for who I was as a person. The situation was eventually diffused when Jen told me she had moved the dresses so I wouldn't have to be burdened with the chore after a long day at the office.

I was quick to cast judgement on Jen's motivations because — based on a lifetime of experience — I assumed she was as utterly ashamed of me as others had expressed about me in my past. She was, in truth, fearful of the reaction and rejection she would receive if she had to explain the „not in her size" dresses to her visiting daughters.

Our reactions are comprised of the experiences we have amassed over a lifetime. Sometimes, we drag along emotional baggage with us, even if we know we should have left it at the airport luggage claim carousel. My initial reaction to my self-perceived Savannah-centric issues may not ever lessen in intensity. At least, however, I can work on how to follow up my visceral reactions with positivity and understanding for the loved ones around me.

CAT CLAWS

There were (and still are) growing pains with any life change of this magnitude. It matters not how many times a person moves; a purge needs to be done before the move (if you can let go of things) and another one done once you get to where you're going (if you get around to taking everything out of the boxes). We left a lot behind before leaving New York. Not just clothes and old documents, but also friends made and cultivated over two decades. To move a long distance is, sometimes, akin to starting completely from scratch.

And, we did start from scratch. Other than knowing the people at my work via visits and phone calls, we didn't have a soul in South Carolina to lean on. Jen and I needed to lean on each other. We did, and Savannah needed all of the support she could get. I almost broke. I was surprised Jen didn't bend under all the additional weight, as well.

It wasn't all doom, gloom, desperation and angst after our move to South Carolina, however. Jen did lots of little things to keep me set to positive. From taking me dress shopping to helping me find a crossdressing community, Jen went to great lengths to help me acclimate. Another break-out thing she did may seem trivial, but also meant the world to me.

What did she do that was so wonderful?

It involved paint!

I had planned to meet a friend at a club and asked Jen if she would paint my nails. She said, „Yes." As insignificant as it may sound, this act of togetherness — where I watched her work carefully on each finger with two coats of polish — brought home the level of her commitment and love for me as both her boyfriend and as Savannah.

I was so excited to tell my friends about Jen painting my nails. I probably seemed too giddy about it, most likely to the point of annoyance. But, I didn't care. I was happy to be Savannah... and happy to share my life with someone willing to sacrifice her pre-existing worldview in favor of one including the acceptance beyond two specific gender binary roles.

ONGOING

Our move to South Carolina has past our one year anniversary (May 2019). We have enjoyed our first major holidays of Independence Day, Halloween, a quiet Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Eve. The seasons have turned, and will continue to do so. I look forward with hope that Jen and I will continue to grow in our understanding of each other (it

is not a one-way street), supporting each other as we walk upon the sometimes craggy and slippery road of life.

Life is not static, but an ever-changing adventure. It is our responsibility to accept the challenge and take on the quest before us. We may not be slaying fire-breathing dragons hoarding the kingdom's gold, but we are working toward the preservation of our own majicks (I think we have been binge-watching SyFy's *Magicians* too much!).

As always... with every new dawn, there is more to come.

2.13. The Pink Fog

Happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you sit down quietly, may alight upon you.

~ Nathaniel Hawthorne

There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be butterfly.

~ R. Buckminster Fuller

INTRODUCTION

The late blooming crossdressers tend to jumpstart their development over a period of months instead of cultivating their identity over a period of years. Whether because of trauma, denial, or other emotional or environmental factors, many dressers don't find themselves facing a feminine reflection until adulthood. There is sometimes an urgency to their development — a rush of regret for an unrealized feminine youth and years of opportunities.

HAZE

A pink haze refers to *being so infatuated with someone that you can't think straight*. For the crossdresser, he is definitely infatuated with someone... *herself*! When the pink fog (pink haze is for normal people infatuations) rolls in, it is a blinding and emotionally charged mist that encompasses our entire reason for being. It is akin to an addiction. The crossdressers can't get enough of their feminine forms — the intense pleasure and excitement, the pursuit of untried adventures. Loved ones' feelings take a back seat to the crossdressers' own desires. Every new adventure raises the bar of crossdressing normalcy.

How much is too much?

How fast is too fast?

How far is too far?

Each man's discovery of his inherent femininity is different. Each relationship with their partner is unique. Each descent into the pink fog results in any measure of duration and degree of influence. Regardless, the most important takeaway is remembering its influence.

What do you mean?

Please remember, dear crossdresser, the consequences of your actions. Don't abandon your excellent qualities in favor of paper-thin emotional highs. Remember that you are not the only person in your own life (unless you are single and have zero attachments). Your new excitement, mostly likely, is unfamiliar to those around you, and may hold some trepidation.

It is difficult to pass by sales for a dress or pair of heel. I have fallen prey to those urges, too. But on a limited budget, I don't have the luxury of endless shopping. My girlfriend's hand-me-downs and thrift store finds are amazing, as well. You can wear an outfit in your closet more than once.

I'M ON TOP OF THE WORLD, MA!

The above title is what most people remember James Cagney saying in the classic film, *White Heat*. The fact that the actual quote from the movie, „Made it, Ma! Top of the world!", illustrates the fact our memory of events is not always flawless. The Pink Fog, in the same way, alters our perception of the reality around us.

What do you mean, Savannah?

Under the influence of the Pink Fog, we crossdressers are not always in our right minds. We experience a sudden rush of elation as we explore our femininity. After crossing skydiving off my bucket list, I did an assessment of the experience. First were several minutes of mortal questioning as to whether this was the right thing to do (acknowledging our crossdressing). Immediately following was a sense of calm (accepting our crossdressing as a tangible thing). The calm did not last long as self-preservation kicked in. Why would I jump out of a mechanically sound airplane (stepping outside the door dressed in feminine attire)? Finally, the plunge through the air overloads the senses (as we succumb to the elation of being out in public, possibly with other crossdressers).

When you are freefalling, you experience a sense of floating. I was so overwhelmed by it — and so focused on another skydiver taking pictures and video of me — I completely missed out on the curvature of the earth and the amazing entirety of Long Island as seen from 12,000 feet.

The freedom to explore our crossdressing can lead to such a ferocious femme single-mindedness that we succumb to it like an addiction. Our female sides, so desperate to get out after years of denial and suppression, may become our dominant mistresses if we are not careful. We may forget we have any other responsibilities as we wholly focus only on our feminine expression.

WARNING SIGNS

Always be on the lookout for the tell-tale signs of the Pink Fog — although, most times, one cannot see beyond its veil when they are enveloped by it. First, when dressing, you encounter a feeling of euphoria. Second, your brain may disengage from risk aversion. Finally, your credit cards or bank account may suddenly take a hit from your emerging pastime. Let's take a look at some examples.

RUNNERS' HIGH

The euphoria that comes from newly accepted femininity is exciting on many sensory levels. With the transformation from a drab male persona to a sultry vixen — complete with flowing long blond hair and fire engine-red lips — us realize we would certainly *pursue* this woman in the mirror. *She* is hot. *She* is so alive with her smooth skin, silky smooth nylons and high heels. A spritz of perfume waifs into our nostrils. The gentle tinkle of long earrings or the swish of silky fabric fills our ears. Our senses are tingling with who we have become.

The urgency of finally experiencing our feminine selves serves to fuel and heighten these wonderful feelings. There is nervous anticipation of the fun yet to come as the night unfolds. Who knows what experiences may come our way? Maybe a bit of dancing... maybe a chance intimate encounter?

RISK VERSUS REWARD

It is one thing to stray into periodic and fanciful daydreaming about what life would be like living full-time as a beautiful woman (only concerned about nightlife adventures). It is another thing to focus so much on it that we forget about the braided wire of responsibility we tightrope walk across on a daily basis.

The Pink Fog affects us in ways we least expect — like alcohol does for some. Our excitement to be out in our feminine identities may lower our inhibitions. We come out of our shells as we delve into the exploration of our true nature. It's a ‚coming out" party every night! Caution is thrown to the wind! We can become so enveloped by validating confidence our ability to recognize and avoid unwanted risk is dampened. We can strut down dark alleys and seedy bars without worry.

We are bullet-proof.

Nothing can hurt us.

Looking back on those risky nocturnal adventures — once back to reality — we realize those notions of immortality false. But, even daylight and a return to common sense is no guarantee of safety. Even in the light of day in our home or office, the wispy intoxicating murmur of alluring danger that can seduce us at a moment's notice.

FASHION CRISIS

While we revel in our recent outing and get excited about the next, we realize we have nothing to wear, our hair isn't as attractive as the other gurls, we need a new pair of heels if we are going to buy a new skirt... and we might as well get that new purse to match the rest of it!!

And, new makeup!

And, perfume!

Suddenly, our lives are taken over by an overwhelming need to take our feminine presentation to the next level — as quickly as possible. Our new girlie pocket book suddenly has less cash in it and our credit cards — for some reason — are carrying a heavier balance. It doesn't matter, though. The elation of being our feminine selves blinds us to the physical public risks, emotional effects at home, and our fiscal irresponsibility.

YOU BETTER RECOGNIZE!

The Pink Fog is an elemental force easily distracting you from your day-to-day life. It threatens your ability to make good decisions and keep equilibrium in your daily life. There is hope, however, in curtailing this incessant dusty rose colored wispy monster. The following tips may help to mitigate the effects of the Pink Fog.

First and foremost, you need to be cognizant to when it appears. It is insidious in its nature to creep up on you to place a veil of irrational thoughts of femininity over your eyes.

Your crossdressing is the most important thing in your life — the only thing. Work be damned... relationships be damned... ooh, that handbag would look amazing next to the

other one I have in the same color... that man at the end of the bar keeps staring at me; he must be interested in what he sees.

Once you recognize the signs of altered thinking, you can slow the Pink Fog's progress and break its hold.

Even if I know the Pink Fog is coming, how do I claw my way back to reality?

Stay in the present. Strengthen your mental muscle of self-awareness. These are the most important assets at your disposal. Recognition that our perception is wholly different when under the cloud of the Pink Fog is paramount. Once we understand its effects on us, we can craft different ways of controlling the urges the hazy temptress tries to demand of us. Read on to get a checklist of useful exercises.

ADMINISTERING AN ANECDOTE

Combating the Pink Fog means to beat her back and put her in a cage — a thought cage. Good information and tips are out there to help — both for a crossdresser's Pink Fog and for a person with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Both have some of the same symptoms. According to an article from the Lehigh Valley Renaissance website[34], it is important to add structure back into your Pink Fog-fractured routine.

- SET SMALL GOALS - Set smaller, timed goals to focus on, only allowing yourself a few minutes of reward for a job well done. For example, you can set a goal to finish an office report in ninety minutes. Once completed, you can reward yourself five minutes to research about crossdressing or add items to your Amazon wish list.

- AVOID DISTRACTION - Do not let daily distraction and „time-suckers" creep into your routine, except for in the aforementioned relegated reward timeslots. Social media of all types — personal emails, Netflix, Facebook, etc. — are notorious rabbit holes that take your mind away from the more important matters of the day. Don't allow these things to derail your focus from the tasks at hand. Keep yourself mentally sharp and focused, but also keep your physical self well... er... as well.

- TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY - Your mind is a terrible thing to waste. I'm sure I heard that someplace. Unfortunately, the mind — as powerful an instrument as it is touted to be — is a symbiotic organ to the body as a whole, and is directly affected by the plights of the body. Yes, we understand the terms „mind over matter", but the body matters, too. Having a healthy active regimen of exercise or activity — coupled with proper moderation (alcohol, sweets, fats, tobacco, caffeine) — allows the mind to focus on the right things.

Treating ourselves right dampens stress, heightens the wanted chemical production and responses in the body, keeps the circulatory systems pumping, and provides an outlet where the mind can run on auto-pilot for a while. And, as a benefit, the better we take care of our

[34] https://www.renaissancelv.org/single-post/2016/07/14/Dealing-With-The-Pink-Fog

bodies, the better we are going to look in the dress we just added to our online shopping cart. It's a win/win.

2.14. Masculinity vs Femininity

I definitely feel closer to the feminine side of the human being than I do the male — or the American idea of what a man is supposed to be. Just watch a beer commercial and you'll see what I mean.

~ Kurt Cobain

Masculinity is not something given to you, but something you gain. And you gain it by winning small battles with honor.

~ Norman Mailer

MEDIUM

I had taken Jen to a psychic entertainment dinner package for her birthday. In the next day's retelling of the event, one of my co-workers pointed out their feeling that there was a fundamental difference between magicians and psychics. Magicians were accepted without skepticism (creating magic through practical physical skill), while most psychics were treated with cynicism (claiming physical connections to the „other side"). The irony is that — while both professions use illusions and misdirection — there a notion of implied realism versus implied trickery.

Can the same be said to be true about crossdressers? Do people assume we are trying to trick them into believing we are genetic women? Knowing many of us will be „clocked" while out as our feminine selves, can we really be said to be tricking anyone? There are bar stories where men will get frustrated and lash out when finding out they were attracted to a woman who they discovered to be a *he*. They were angered to be unwillingly baited into an attraction to a crossdressing man. Why were they ever caught in the allure of the fake woman sipping an apple martini at the end of the bar to begin with? Maybe they were even conflicted by the strange stirring feelings they experienced, only able to process them by lashing out in some way.

Typical men!

But, is it typical?

GENDER STEREOTYPES

We have been conditioned from birth (practically) to accept men and women as possessing and exhibiting certain traits. Boys are designated as blue (sometimes yellow) and girls are designated as pink. I mean, how would we be able to know the gender of the baby at the reveal party if we didn't know what color to use?

Sure, in general, men have more muscle mass and women are more maternal, and...um... I actually had to go to the vast and deep knowledge of the Internet to recall the actual gender stereotypes, since I fall outside the idea of ‚typical'. According to

PlannedParenthood.org[35], four basic gender stereotypes exist — personality traits, domestic behaviors, occupations, and physical appearance.

The first gender stereotype — personality traits — relegates women to more passive and submissive roles, while men are expected to be more self-confident and aggressive. Men are hunters; women are gatherers. Primitive Man has always been caricaturized as the dominant gender of the species, clubbing women on their heads and dragging them by the hair back to their caves.

The second trait — domestic behaviors — revolves around the dynamic of the division of labor within a nuclear relationship. Women are maternal (see, I remembered one!), best suited for the caring and raising of the children. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be able to fix a pipe and mow the lawn. How long will a wife or girlfriend fume at the overflowing kitchen garbage because it is the man's job to tie up the bag and take it to the can outside? How often will men wait for their spouses to prepare dinner for them before they make a grilled cheese sandwich in a huff? Why are those ideals still prevalent? Are men more mechanically inclined? Are they necessarily the stronger of the species? Are women, necessarily, better homemakers?

When it comes to the third stereotype — occupations — the assumed division of labor still persists. It reminds me of the following riddle:

> *A father and son are in a horrible car crash, killing the dad. The son is rushed to the hospital. Just as he's about to go under the knife, the surgeon says, „I can't operate — that boy is my son!" How is that possible?*

Did you get the right answer?

Did it take you a minute?

Give up?

The surgeon couldn't operate on the boy because they were the boy's mother. Wait! What? Preposterous! Women can't be doctors!

The above example is still a lingering standard of the occupational stereotyping engrained in us. It is based on classifying women as second-class citizens with the assumption they lack the intelligence to pursue male-dominated careers. We couldn't fathom that women simply weren't afforded the opportunity of a proper education. Instead, we just thought they were being dumb ole girls. Conversely, men in female-dominated roles — secretaries, executive assistants, nurses — are considered to be *less than* and made the butt of jokes concerning performing what is considered women's work. Even today, predominantly female roles on television and in film are given to gay men characters for laughs — further perpetuating the stereotypes of genders in occupation. Luckily, that dynamic is slowly changing.

---

[35] https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/gendergender-identity/what-are-gender-roles-and-stereotypes

The last, and probably the most apropos to our discussion, is physical appearance. Men are expected to be broad-shouldered, tall, and muscular. Women are expected to be graceful and small, slight of frame, and demure. If you sit in a Starbucks for any period of time and people watch (like I do while I supposed to be writing), a myriad of people getting their caffeine fix come through in all shapes, sizes, and colors. But, we still cling to popularized and standardized notions of what women and men should be and how they should conduct themselves.

Words commonly used to describe femininity are:

Dependent, emotional, passive, sensitive, quiet, graceful, innocent, weak, flirtatious, nurturing, self-critical, soft, sexually submissive, accepting

Words commonly used to describe masculinity are:

Independent, non-emotional, aggressive, tough-skinned, competitive, clumsy, experienced, strong, active, self-confident, hard, sexually aggressive, rebellious

THESE TRAITS ARE VERY back-and-white. No flexibility is allowed or accepted for masculinity within the feminine list, and vice versa. To the contrary, the truth is that all men and women are an amalgam of both masculine and feminine labels. Of course, some traits are more dominant than others. I can only hope people accept others for who they are—regardless of the mix of the recipe. Maybe if we were more open-minded about others, we would not feel the need to suppress our truest identities — an idea that carries way beyond the spectrum of crossdressers.

GENDER BEGINNINGS

Why aren't men allowed to cry when they watch *The Green Mile*? That scene of the warden's house with John Coffey and the warden's wife is heartbreaking. So is the scene when he shakes Paul Edgecomb's hand before riding the lightning... sniff. Why are men expected to express their feelings differently than women? Have we been so conditioned in our gender roles that the mere notion of impropriety in our specific and defined gender will condemn us in the eyes of others?

We *are* conditioned. From birth, we are told and shown what it means to be a boy or a girl. When I grew up, parents still adhered to traditional gender stereotypes. I would have been petrified — and, probably, disciplined — if my dad had found out I liked to dress in frilly and satiny clothes. I knew I would not be accepted, already having been conditioned to *know* what was appropriate for girls and boys through my family dynamic, socialization with other kids, and entertainment.

IT BEGINS WITH THE TRUTH

We are starting to see the deprogramming of children from traditional gender roles. Spectacular! But what about all the thirty-something (and up) men and women who were already conditioned in their gender roles? For them (and I mean me, too), it is an uphill battle to win over hearts and minds about how crossdressers are a normally occurring phenomenon.

As I had mentioned earlier, I knew well enough to hide my crossdressing to avoid the disapproval of my mother and the wrath of my father. That shame and fear served to lock me into a facade of the accepted masculine role of conformity. It has taken me years to discover my gender truth and to deprogram myself from the traditionalist views of what I thought defined a boy or girl. We all desire to be true to ourselves (as far as we understand our truth), denying our natures due to our environment, upbringing, and culture.

Ask yourself, „Why would I want to explore something considered abhorrent and subject to scorn and ridicule?“ Nobody enjoys rejection. None of us want to fear for our safety. We only want to be loved and accepted. So many of us *go along to get along*, taking on a mantle of exaggerated or false masculinity (or femininity, if a female-to-male crossdresser) in order to stay within a circle of acceptance.

Living the male stereotype serves to create a masculine shell that mentally castrates the crossdressing man (ouch) from his innate feminine feelings. You have to remember that the acceptance of more feminine qualities in men (metro-sexuality, for example) is only a generation or two old. Women, on the other hand, have typically been accepted when adopting masculine stereotypes in clothing or mannerisms.

Sure, stereotypes have their roots in truth. But, in fact, they are the most basic definition of any broad group. Asians are all smart. Caucasians are all privileged. African Americans are all thugs. Crossdressers are all sex-crazed perverts. We perpetuate the myths based on a vague misunderstanding of the group as a whole. Worse, we cling to those generalities in our ignorance, finding validation in every experience where it reinforces our existing bias and ignoring any proof that runs contrary to our beliefs.

CROSSDRESSERS ARE DUMB

Women can wear pants, but men can’t wear skirts. Women can be masculine and assertive for their careers, but men are teased for showing sensitive emotions (although women are still considered to be the B-Word sometimes if too assertive, unfortunately). Women are applauded for being more like men. Men are ridiculed or labeled as gay if they seem more effeminate. The other day, while employing Marie Kondo’s practices and tips for only keeping clothes and heels that „spark joy“, Jen watched me try on my heels to decide which pairs made me happy. She told me later a thought flitted through her head as to, „why is it wrong for a man to wear heels?“ It’s a crazy loopy-loop rollercoaster of double standards.

Sigh.

Ironically, we male crossdressers are guilty of using already established female stereotypes to define our own feminine identities. And, not only that, we sometimes exaggerate the female form to such a degree — in our pursuit of our presentation of womanhood — we fail to realize we are skirting the line of becoming a parody of what we hold in the highest regard.

Our feminine pursuits can put us on a collision course of epitomizing an outdated cookie-cutter version of what we believe the perfect woman to be. I have met several trans-women who love the now-trendy retro rockabilly look, or take on a 1950s pearl-adorned

housewife persona. Is that what they think a woman is? Is that more of a masquerade than a true feminine expression?

Of course, who am I to judge any person's gender expression? I am just as guilty of taking my feminine expression to a level beyond what some cis-women do (even on their best dress up days). I prefer heels three inches or higher. I love form-fitting dresses and outfits that accentuate my fake curves, even if going to a casual restaurant. I love heavier smoky eye makeup and thick lashes. Do I oversexualize the female form? Maybe... probably.

For Your Consideration ~

I used to always need to wear French manicure press-on nails to complete my look — possibly because I was trying to draw attention away from my larger hands and forearms. Nowadays, I have become more comfortable in my skin, not as worried about being ‚clocked' because of short nails and hairy arms.

I pursue my femininity by keeping my heels on at the reception, while most genetic women cast their heels under the reception hall table in favor of uncrushed toes and pain-free arches at the earliest opportunity. We wear corsets tight enough to leave indentations on our torsos. Most woman hate having to wear any form of Spanx or pantyhose for too long a period. We suffer for our craft. We endure the pain and discomfort for a successful illusion of our expression. Anything less feels incomplete.

HEM-AGEDDON

My girlfriend has been great with giving me constructive criticism and offering me first pick of her older clothes. She has a spirited, gypsy style and I have been happy to add those items into my wardrobe. What we constantly disagree on is the length of the hemline and the tightness of my skirts. We can't agree on everything, I guess. And I can't make the general populace suffer by covering up my best assets — my legs!

Some crossdressers may want to rethink their feminine expression into a more modern and trendy style if they wish to become *just another one of the girls*. If the goal is to blend in, understanding „when to wear what when" is key. Keeping to these established guidelines will allow you to ghost through a restaurant without turning heads (in a negative, appraising way). Five-inch-heeled thigh high boots may not be the best choice for a run to Starbucks. As the knight guarding the Holy Grail in the cave in the final act of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* said, „choose wisely."

TRUE TO FORM

It's important to keep in mind the idea of balance and truth in who you are. We all have varying degrees of masculinity and femininity. The only reason why the two halves are separated is because we have been taught that they should be. The assignment of *appropriate* gender behavior has been based on a social system set in place long before we stepped into it.

For me, I have always seen the world a bit differently than most of the boys around me. I had more female friends. Sometimes, it was effortless to engage with males. Other times, it

was more like work. I didn't seek out uber-masculine pursuits, in general, but I did try out for the high school football team in an effort to fit in. I was more of a bookworm, a nerd, a geek... you know, all sorts of labels we have had thrust upon us.

My lack of machismo may have been a day-to-day struggle as a teenager and young adult, but it also allowed me to be more in balance with my feminine side at an earlier age. My gender duality subtly shaped the direction of my life. The eventual acceptance of my authentic self brought with it a very important natural byproduct.

Honesty.

We have to be true to ourselves. As crossdressers, it is of the utmost importance to explore all we can about who we could possibly be. A comprehensive crossdressing manual isn't available, but there is a vast volume of reading, blogs, vlogs, and videos on the Internet for us and the entire LBGTQ+ community. Let me remind you that I'm talking about much more than erotic fiction and webcam sites.

Be thoughtful. Be mindful. Be reflective. Only through the rigor of thorough self-examination will you discover what you have been suppressing, if anything. I'm not talking about the Pink Fog so many crossdressers blast through in an effort to make up for lost time. No, I am referring to the act of looking into your soul to discover what you may have sub-consciously hidden away. Armed with the maps and journals of exploration, you will find it easier to open yourself up to your personal truth.

WHAT'S THAT EXPRESSION?

The non-fetish, non-transitioning crossdresser doesn't want to be locked into one gender expression. Personally, I love being a genetic man as much as I love being Savannah. I don't mind a bit of scruff (until it gets itchy). I also don't mind a tight bodycon scuba material dress (on me or my girlfriend).

At the end of the day, we want to be appreciated and accepted... just as all people. A non-fetish crossdresser does not dress simply to prowl for a man or to mock a woman's femininity. We find relief from our typical masculine trappings by donning feminine attire and applying makeup. This allows us to express ourselves in a manner typically reserved for the cis-females of our species.

I remember going into The Village in NYC, on Halloween, dressed as my favorite female Marvel superheroine. A man came up to me and asked me for a light for his cigarette. If you had seen me, you would have quickly realized I had no place on my person to possibly hide any flammable materials. Below is the exchange, verbatim:

„Do you have a light?"

„Sorry", I said in my normal male voice. „I don't smoke."

„Oh, shit. You're a dude!" he replied, drifting away.

I was flattered this young drunk man didn't clock me as a man until I spoke. It felt good to pass casual inspection while presenting as a woman. I felt sexy and desirable. Later on, several young female Asian tourists stopped me for a group picture. I was happy to be a good memory of their Halloween night in New York City.

Do you want to be perceived as a woman?

I want to be passable as Savannah — so, in that way, the answer would be, „Yes." However, I have no problem using whichever bathroom is considered gender-appropriate based on local laws. I often struggle with perfecting my feminine appearance — and wished my added padding for an hourglass shape was natural while dressing.

For Your Consideration ~

In our attempts to emulate our own feminine standards, we sometimes forget passability is not the same as acceptance. Hell, tolerance is not the same as acceptance! Being mistaken for a woman at first glance is not the same as being accepted as a crossdressing man. My hope is to go beyond my ability to pass as a woman and get into the unknown territory of simple acceptance of who I am — a person.

DOES GENDER EQUAL SEXUALITY

An inherent social human convention states gender dictates sexual preference. Men are attracted to women; women are attracted to men. That may be the human species default, but it is not an absolute. It is presumptive to think that if you are presenting as one gender you must be attracted to the opposite gender. We've covered this point before because it was one of the huge misconceptions I've personally dealt with.

For Your Consideration ~

Some male crossdressers like to experiment in the bedroom as their female personas with their girlfriends or wives. This should be considered a safe space between partners. While I understand that some cis-partners may find intimacy with their crossdressers unnerving — or worry about how they would feel in their attraction and engagement with another woman—they should remember that this person in their bed is still their partner, regardless of dress. When our cis-partners come to bed in a loose t-shirt and boy-shorts, we still see them as the women we love.

There are stereotypes abound when it comes to human sexuality. A penis goes into a vagina. That is the accepted practice. But, the human body is a wonderland to be explored, both physically and psychologically — for male and female alike. A man wanting to feel something penetrative should not be considered stigmatic. Both partners need to understand this type of experimentation does not automatically mean he wants to be intimate with another man. Pleasure is pleasure, and should not be automatically assigned to a specific gender.

PASSING THOUGHTS

Crossdressing is typically not a passing fancy. The need is something men may suppress throughout their lives. We may try, more than once, to purge the urge out of our systems, only to find the desire insistently coming back to haunt us.

Living in denial was only good for Queen Cleopatra.

2.15. Did You Hear About The Crossdresser?

In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood.

~ Henry David Thoreau

Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

WAR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES

Everyone seems to have a story of a close encounter of the LGBTQ+ kind. I got to hear two trans-tales at work a week after Jen and I relocated to South Carolina. Suddenly, two older white men were regaling me about trans-folks. It was as if I were a spy for the LGBT community, looking these co-workers square in the eye as they told their stories — all the while wearing a pair of black satin panties under my slacks.

After listening to their tales of terror about trans-people, I was amazed they survived the encounter, Savannah thought sarcastically to herself. To frame the scene, I need you to know that both of these men (one New York-born, the other from South Carolina) are generous folk with kind hearts. As expected, they also have an old-school way of thinking about the world and the people in it. Both stories were meant as funny anecdotes of chance meetings with queer folk — meant to be told just between „the guys".

If the stories had been movie trailers, the first would have been a thriller about a man and his family on a trip stopped at a sketchy hotel with flickering fluorescent bars in the lobby. The second would have been a slapstick comedy about a man on a business trip in an airport trying to get back home, in spite of constant mishaps.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE TRANS-KIND

Donald had finally finished checking in his family at the hotel after a hard day on the road. While the kids and his wife settled into the room, he just needed to get away, for a minute, to stretch his legs. The lobby was bright and full of people waiting at the reception desk — even at this hour. Instead of staying inside, Donald decided to wander around the parking lot.

As he looked off into the plum sky — signifying the end of another day — he caught the burning dot of a lit cigarette floating above the ground. A silhouette sat behind that cigarette, backlit by the cone of light falling from one of the parking lot lights. It was a long-haired woman. Donald registered her, then dismissed her just as quickly. It had been a long day and he was suddenly tired of being outside. Fresh air did not always refresh a person, apparently. More propaganda by The Man!

He turned away to go back inside, noticing out of the corner of his eye the woman had finished her cigarette. While Donald waited at the elevator bank, the cigarette-smoking

girl stepped up beside him. A quick sideways glance revealed the cigarette-smoking girl was not a girl at all.

They entered the elevator cab together. No words were spoken between them. Donald was hesitant to even to look at her... umm, him. He couldn't figure out if he/she was gender queer, a crossdresser, or a trans-woman. They rode up the elevator in silence until she got out at her floor — and he was left alone with his thoughts.

When the story was concluded, I asked Donald if he engaged with the woman at all. He confirmed he tried to NOT look at the woman, uncomfortable around a trans-individual.

In and of itself, the story is fairly innocuous. Plenty of us refrain from talking to people in elevators. He had been on the road all day. Maybe he hadn't been up for dialogue with anyone who may have come aboard the elevator. All that taken into account, the tone Donald used to describe the event was one akin to being confronted with an oddity. Meeting a couple from Wisconsin wouldn't have been as interesting a story. Worse, Donald had grown up on Long Island, New York, with, at least, some exposure to the LGBTQ+ community over the years, so I was a bit floored he thought the story was relevant at all.

TERMINAL-LY ILL

In the second story, in an attempt to outdo the preceding tale, Daniel wanted to tell his own story about his encounter with a trans-individual. We all do it, wanting to share our own experiences about whatever topic is being bantered about. It's only natural. Daniel was much more adept at storytelling than Donald, knowing how to 'spin a yarn', as it were. His story did not take place at a hotel, but, instead, in an airport terminal.

Daniel arrived early to the airport and sat in one of the dozens of empty seats at the departing gate. Since he had arrived so early, the gate had yet to fill up with any frequent flyers. When one flies out of a New York-based airport, people are more apt to race through the terminal to catch a flight at the last second versus arriving early with hours to kill before boarding.

With plenty of empty chairs around him, Daniel was easily distracted by a flamboyantly dressed gender queer male who decided to sit next to him. With so many seats empty at this specific gate, Daniel got up, grabbed his duffle and relocated a few seats farther away.

The other flyer exclaimed, „I never!"

Daniel replied with, „And you never will."

The other flyer was aghast with Daniel's quick retort and said no more. The gate agent, who had been at the podium throughout the exchange, smiled at Daniel's comment and wit. Later, when people were lining up in preparation for boarding, Daniel was called to the podium. When asking why he had been summoned, the gate agent told him he could board first because he had been so funny when dealing with the queer traveler earlier.

Daniel was very proud of how he dealt with the alterative-gender flyer, happy to regale us with his exploits. I am still not 100% sure of the story's validity, but I agreed with the etiquette of not sitting directly next to someone if other seats are available. To enter another person's personal space is a traveler's faux pas (at least to Americans). In this case, I can't side with the trans-traveler's etiquette. But, I did take offense at how proud Daniel was how he dealt with this *undesirable of society*.

Of course, I may have a personal bias.

WHY ASK WHY?

The stories, in my opinion, say much about the storytellers themselves. Donald's tale revealed how uncomfortable he was around people he didn't fully understand. Coming from New York, he wasn't ignorant about alternative lifestyles, but was still very conservative in his worldview. Daniel was a „good ole southern boy", not cottoning to all that foo-foo metrosexual stuff. He was proud of his masculinity and the *natural* order of things.

Does having conservative values or being steeped in traditional thinking excuse their actions (or inactions)? It's hard to tell. I didn't do anything to educate either of them, beyond asking how they engaged with the individuals they encountered... and then following up with a ‚Why not?'.

Why didn't you say anything more?

Because of fear. Sharing my knowledge of alternative lifestyles or personal anecdotes could reveal to the world who I really am. In front of these men, I felt compelled to remain silent. I let pass an opportunity to possibly broaden their definition of what gender means. It's a tough spot to be in. I live in the Bible Belt now. Guns are easy to come by and you can find a church on the horizon in every direction.

GROWING IN POPULARITY

But, times, they are a-changing. The old guard is slowly turning over to the new. While I am still searching for an active crossdressing community here in the Upstate of South Carolina (as of this writing in late 2019), I have found a place in the more-expansive LGBTQ community. I have found the younger crowds are very in tune with the ever-changing and expanding landscape of gender and sexual alternatives. The following two stories will counteract the ones I have just shared. Both involve younger women with a Southern upbringing, but with more exposure to popular culture and more-modern worldviews.

Twenty-two-year-old Catie knew I cosplayed for comic cons. She knew I had an accepting view on a person's lifestyle. Since we worked in close proximity, Catie felt very comfortable sharing her passion for make-up and for all of the YouTube celebrities she was interested in. She loved tutorials. One of the Youtubers, Nikita Dragun — who had cameoed on her subscribed Patrick Starrr channel — had struck her fancy, so she followed her, as well. It came to Catie's attention Nikita was actually a transwoman — and still had a penis. Gasp! Catie was astounded that Nikita looked so legit (Or, so ‚on fleek'? Is that what the kids are saying these days?)

We discussed Catie's curiosity of Nikita's biological choices. She wondered why Nikita didn't want to have bottom SRS surgery, googling the internet for any enlightening vids. She didn't understand why a person would want to present as a full-time woman, but would still want to keep her male genitalia. All the while, we sat under the picnic table umbrella having an intelligent discourse about alternative lifestyles not her own.

The second story involves another female co-worker named Leslie. She had been married for nineteen years and had one daughter who recently came out, declaring herself a lesbian. Leslie had quickly accepted this admission, already having an inkling of her daughter's preference in sexuality. Leslie considered herself a „hippie" parent. She was very open about her feelings on any subject, both accepting and snarky in the same breath. But, this story is not about her teenaged daughter. Instead, it is a tale hitting a little closer to home.

One recent afternoon, under the same picnic table umbrella at work, Leslie and I were lunch-breaking together. Catie was off work and our other co-worker friend was catching up with a pile of orders to be processed. Leslie and I chatted about a bunch of inconsequential topics for the first fifteen minutes. As time ticked away, Leslie finally said she, „... had to tell me something [I haven't] even had a chance to mention to [my] sister, yet...", but felt the need to tell someone. My ears perked up. Her husband of almost two decades admitted to her that he liked to wear women's panties. With so little time left on our break, I couldn't fully unpack her statement or offer any advice beyond general knowledge (without revealing more about Savannah, prematurely).

Leslie said, „whatever turned him on turned her on", and was only concerned with, „what if this desire leads him to being gay?" I wanted to tell her that wearing panties was not synonymous with sexual attraction, but there wasn't enough time to discuss it. The fact her next comment was that one of her husband's sexual fantasies involved a friend — a male friend — did not help me offer any sage and scant advice. I promised her I would think about what she told me and follow up with her the next day. Because of the delicate nature of the topic, I ended up writing a note with questions for her to think about or to ask her husband (in the hopes he might reflect on them).

As of this writing we have not revisited the topic again, but I will always be ready to assist her any way I can.

MORE TO SHARE

I have written before about my gender duality reveal process. There is an internal debate of whether to engage with them. A mental risk assessment is performed to determine the likelihood of whether the reveal will be a positive experience. While revealing myself to my girlfriend was a big risk — and a necessity — doing the same with family, friends and co-workers is wholly a choice.

I have revealed myself to all of my adult romantic partners, a couple of my close family members, and a select number of co-workers I considered more friends than colleagues.

Sometimes, the decision to share Savannah stemmed from a sense of dishonesty. When that hurt became too palpable for me, I revisited and reflected on the risk of sharing my true self.

Remember, sharing your crossdressing is not just about you. It may be a weight lifted off your shoulders, but it will become a burden for the other person to carry. Will they accept who you are? Are they understanding and strong enough to carry your secret? There are many factors to consider. At the end of the day, it boils down to how authentic you want to live your life.

PREGNANT PAUSE

I will not bore you with every episode of me revealing Savannah to others. Even though I haven't shared her with too many people, every time I do it includes much deliberation and self-reflection. One of the most notable recent reveals still warms my heart, and serves as a reminder that being true to my authentic self is both rewarding and important.

I am friends with a young co-worker named Amy. When just the two of us in the office, we had countless philosophical discussions about work, life and relationships. We shared notes on almost every topic... except Savannah. Finally, a point came where I tired of skewing the truth of Savannah's exploits when asked, „How was your weekend?". Every time I manufactured a new fib for her benefit — covering up the true me — it left a sour taste in my mouth. She deserved better. Savannah deserved better.

So, on one of those weekday mornings — when it was only her and me — I asked her over to my desk and told her it had become important to share something personal with her. I showed her a photo of Savannah from my smartphone. She didn't bat an eyelash. Maybe, she had already suspected I had another dimension to my identity. Maybe, she was just in tune with how gender and alternative lifestyles were changing in world culture and exposure.

Regardless, she was happy I had shared my authentic self. I was ecstatic for the positive outcome and a deeper friendship. We spoke about a few more personal details, finally able to discuss my previously published work under my Savannah Hauk pen name. We hugged and the rest of the day went on as usual.

What is more telling about this reveal was that a week later, Amy came to me on one of those quiet office mornings. She rested her arms on the top of my cubicle half-wall. When I looked up, she was all giddy and grins. She told me she wanted to tell me something she hadn't revealed to anyone else yet at work. Only her mom and boyfriend had been told this particular nugget of knowledge thus far.

Amy was pregnant!

She shared with me because I had shared myself with her. We had strengthened our bonds of friendship through a simple act of vulnerability and honesty. I trusted her enough to be my full self. She trusted me enough to reveal an important bit of news — a major milestone in her life. Truth breeds a different level of love in friendship, if you let it.

SISTER CHRISTIAN

Back in those first proud „coming out" months in the mid- to late-1990s, I sent my older sister a letter by snail mail with an enclosed photo of Savannah. I asked her to call me when

she received the letter. When she did back, she asked, „Who is this a picture of?“ We discussed my need to dress as a woman from time to time. A few weeks later, I received the following letter back.

Dear Brother,

Hi! How are you doing? Thanks for the letter. Wow, where to begin. I will start by saying that I support you in wanting to become who it is you are. I don't think either one of us knows what that is going to entail. I cannot guess what road we are going down, so I want to make sure that we can both be honest. In being honest I mean that if I am uncomfortable that I can tell you and that you will not see it as a rejection. I am not mad or upset. I don't feel confused or lied to. I actually don't know a lot about crossdressing. I know that you are enjoying being able to express yourself in that way.

I guess when you say that you were proud to have finally admitted what you were, that I am still not sure (maybe you feel the same yourself sometimes). I know that a crossdresser is someone who wears clothing of the opposite sex. That part I got. It is everything else that I am not sure what it means. When you made the statement that I had another sister, I assume that you would rather be a woman than a man. I want to be honest about this. I understand what you are doing and that you are happy and that's all I want for you. My gray area, so to speak, is thinking of you as a something different than my brother. That doesn't mean I want you to play a role or pretend with me, just wanted to let you know where I am at. I hope that we will be able to dialogue about this. I realize you might not have all the answers yourself.

Well, I am sorry to hear that your marriage may not work out. I hope that you and [your wife] can work things out. I'm not saying that if she is gay that she should deny that, but really work and talk and make sure it is what you both want. That was not a lecture. I am glad you were able to share, it is too hard to not have someone to talk with.

About Mom and Dad. The big question you need to ask yourself is why do you want to tell them. Let me know and then I can give you better feedback. Some possible reasons:

1. *I want to be truthful and let them know who I really am.*
2. *I don't feel I can have a relationship with them keeping this private.*
3. *They have pissed me off so much in the past I would love to see their faces when I tell them.*
4. *I want them to accept me for who I am.*

Or, maybe you have another one. Let me know.

... more family-oriented chat followed...

Well I am going to wrap this up. Please keep in touch.

MC

That letter from my sister was sent to me in October 1997. That's right! 1997! She was very open and supportive, even if none of us truly understood — at the time — what being a crossdresser meant. And, within the same pages was a letter from my sister's husband. It read as the following:

I thought I'd write you myself. As I'm sure you are curious as to how I feel about your news. First off, I am glad that you felt comfortable sharing this with us, and that you wanted to share it with us. As the brother of the woman I love and as the great guy I met in high school and got to know through the years, I hope that you will always feel comfortable in sharing your life with me. Just think of me as the big brother you never had, only without the sibling rivalry.

I truly care a lot about you, and want you to know that I will always do my best to be there for you. You mentioned in your first letter how you really missed how we were becoming close before we moved. I miss that too. There for a while, and I'm not sure if you even noticed it, it seemed that every time I would ask you how things were going, you would answer in a way which seemed like you were trying to convince me that everything was great. I'm not sure if it was or it wasn't at the time, but I want you to know that you can always be honest with me. I promise that I will not betray your trust.

Likewise, in this relationship of ours, I am going to be truthful with you and hope that we will be able to be open with each other, as well as understanding of each other. I am glad that you have told us about your crossdressing. I echo [your sister's] sentiments in the beginning of the letter regarding the need for us to continue to dialogue about these issues.

Thinking back on all that I know about you, I can see that you have been searching for acceptance, love, encouragement and understanding from the time that I've known you, and probably your entire life. This is good, since everyone wants these things. The unfortunate thing is that not everyone gets these things. Undoubtedly, these are things that, to varying degrees, were missing from your life as you were growing up. I guess that what I am trying to say is that I really feel for you. I care about you and other than letting you know this, the only thing I know that I can do to help you with these issues in your life is to pray that God will grant you peace and heal these hurts that I know you must still feel deep inside.

... more family-oriented chat followed...

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

BC

The letters outlined their love and support for who I had chosen to be, and applauded me for my courage. Ironically, twenty years passed between the delivery of the letter and the next time the subject of her was brought up. My sister's husband was scheduled to attend an

engineering seminar in Brooklyn. My sister hoped her and my nephew could stay with me while her husband was otherwise engaged, making it a family trip.

I asked if my nephew was prone to snooping about. The reason for the question was because the room adjacent to where they were going to stay had all of my Savannah clothes and wigs on display. My sister's reply was simply, „You're still doing that?" Maybe she thought it was like one of those stereotypical ‚lesbian phases" women go through during their college years. Ironically, not only was crossdressing not a phase for me, but Savannah has expanded her influence by telling her story to increasingly larger audiences.

KISSING COUSINS

I had wanted to tell my cousin, Merida, about Savannah during a Thanksgiving trip to my parents, but my mom cancelled the holiday hours before starting off the road-trip due to illness. So, another opportunity to be honest with someone I respect and love was dashed. I had really wanted to reveal Savannah to her. Doing a reveal this important in any other way seems like a cheat. But, after several more months — and with no immediate plans to see her — I had to resort to extreme measures. The following is the actual text exchange between the two of us.

ME: You got a minute to chat? Text-wise, I mean?

MERIDA: Going to meeting, will at 9!

ME: Ok… talk to you at 9.

MERIDA: Perfect!

ME (after 9am): Long meeting...

MERIDA: HA! Yes!! How's it going ☺

ME: Yay.

ME: I have news I wanted to share with you.

MERIDA: Yes? I'm excited I'm sure.

ME: Only my sister and her husband know otherwise.

MERIDA: OK... ☺

ME: It's something personal I was going to tell you last Thanksgiving had I seen you.

MERIDA: Damn...

ME: I love you very much and wanted to share the following.

MERIDA: You're such a butt...

ME: I am Transgender

MERIDA: Ha! I wondered, you make a hell of a woman!

NOTE: I had been slipping subtle notes to my cousin for a few months through texting, making jokes about me being pretty and okay with feminine things.

ME: [a pic of Savannah speaking at a Transgender Day of Remembrance event]

MERIDA: See? Amazing!

ME: I have been trying to drop hints.

ME: [a pic of Savannah and Jen at the Femme Fever party for the „Living with Crossdressing: Defining a New Normal" book signing]

ME: I even wrote a book about it!

ME: Thank you for the compliment!

ME: [pic of cousin sticking her tongue out at me]

ME: [pic of Savannah at a Femme Fever gala event]

ME: I see you are speechless.

MERIDA: That pic looks amazing! Sorry, getting into pissing match with my boss.

MERIDA: I cannot believe you wrote a book and I didn't know! I would love to read it!!

MERIDA: I am happy for you and hope you are living the life you should!!

MERIDA: Life is so short, I am happy you do what you feel and makes you feel happy.

ME: Been this way since I was 6.

MERIDA: I think it's great! And your costumes are out of this world!

MERIDA: For Halloween. Because that's what I've seen.

ME: haha... they are good because of me being TG.

MERIDA: I think it's great and I'm glad you have someone supportive.

ME: It's been a roller coaster over the years, for sure. Lots of fear, disappointment, struggles.

ME: Yes, Jen is amazing!

MERIDA: Yes! Dude we all deserve to be happy.

ME: It's difficult to shift the way one thinks about a crossdresser when you are confronted with it on the first day of a relationship when you thought he was normal.

ME: That's „Ms. Dude" to you ☺ ☺ ☺

MERIDA: Ha true! Just love yourself and live your one life!

MERIDA: Ms dude ☺

ME: That is why I wanted to share with you (for over a year) because you have a wonderful spirit and heart.

MERIDA: Thank you babe! You know we grew up in families where it wasn't about just enjoying your life. The fact we can find what makes us happy and be functional is fucking outstanding!

ME: Totally agree!!!

ME: Thank you for loving me!

ME: If you have any questions about Savannah, let me know. I am always happy to answer.

MERIDA: Thank you!!! I like that name ☺

ME: ☺ :-*

MERIDA: I love the town too!!

MERIDA: You know a few years ago I just came to this place in life where I don't care about judgment or what you're „supposed to do". It's all bullshit. People that live these cookie cutter lives don't really. And they are super miserable. I love to travel. I have my retirement going, but if I use the last 200 in my account for a road trip then I'm game!! Death can happen

any day and my kids will be taken care of. Besides, I'm doing what I love. I'm thankful for this year, I love my hubby, the kids are great.

MERIDA: And I have always admired you for living the life you want. So happy for you!

MERIDA: And if you guys come up we have to go to drag queen bingo. We went a few weeks ago and loved it!!

MERIDA: [pic of cousin, hubby and drag queen]

MERIDA: Look at those heels!

MERIDA: And your dad, whom I love has probably been one of my biggest supporters and critics. He had not always agreed with my choices, but he doesn't have to.

ME: Thank you!! I still have a cookie cutter life... lol... I just become a beautiful woman once every couple of weeks.

ME: BTW — those heels aren't tall at all!

MERIDA: For me they are! You ever want a great laugh put me in heels :'-)

THE ART OF KNOWING

Before I told Merida, I knew in my heart she would be accepting and supportive of my alternate gender lifestyle. While sharing with a partner is important for a healthy relationship, those outside your immediate and continual influence are people you choose to share yourself with. Having good instincts about when to reveal yourself with comes with experience.

How will you know when to share? Listen closely to their beliefs on alternative genders and sexual preferences. Better understand their heart and spirit on how they live their lives and how they treat the people in their own orbits. All of this sounds very hokey, bohemian, and metaphysical. In a way, it is. Sometimes, there is no logic as to why someone may react poorly — or positively — to being told about your crossdressing.

Develop guidelines to help you decide when to tell someone about your crossdressing. In my life, I have a very specific methodology to sharing Savannah. For instance, when it came to the woman most important in my life — my girlfriend — I made it a point to tell her about my crossdressing as soon as I knew we had arrived at a point of intimate and romantic entanglement. Otherwise, sharing my authentic self involves self-reflection and risk assessment. Lately, however, I have been trusting my gut.

THE ART OF KNOWING (WHEN)

When I knew my girlfriend and I were getting serious — or ‚going steady' as the kids used to say — I made it a point to stop what we were doing and tell her I needed to share something important with her. Of course, your partner may anticipate or imagine a sinister or terrible truth soon to be told (already married, riddled with an illness or STD, wanting to break up, etc.).

As you recall from earlier in the book, I sat my girlfriend down on the couch and told her I wanted to show her something. I scrolled through my image gallery and picked a flattering pic of Savannah to show her. As the image sunk in, I explained that the photo is part of who I was as a whole person.

Next may come a litany of questions about why a man would feel the need to crossdress, such as, „...how long have you been doing it?“, „...are you a pervert or fetishy?“, „...do you want to be a woman?“, and „...are you gay?“. How she reacts would be influenced by how well you conduct yourself, and your honesty and earnestness. The rest will come from her perceptions and understanding.

Telling a friend, family member, or co-worker involves the same steps. The only difference is telling these people is considered more a choice. Ask yourself a series of questions before broaching the subject of crossdressing with them.

- Why is it important to share?
- Is there a benefit to telling them?
- Are you are looking for validation?
- Are you looking for a thrill or shock value?

Ask yourself why you feel compelled to tell people about your crossdressing. We are in a unique position among many other LGBTQ+ individuals in terms of our gender identity and presentation. While many trans people need permanently and physically alter their bodies to achieve their serenity, our gender presentation does not have a permanence to it. Therefore, disclosure is an option versus a necessity.

Risk assessment requires calculations involving many factors. What is the balance of the risk versus the reward when contemplating telling others about our crossdressing? What do we have to gain versus what we realistically stand to lose?

For Your Consideration ~

Lately, as I have become more visible as Savannah on Sundays at various Starbucks in the South Carolina upstate (see #SavannahStarbucksSundays on Facebook and Instagram), I have shed my deep need for a thorough risk assessment for people. Following my instincts have served me well this past year. Almost the entire staffs for several Starbucks locations know me as both Savannah and my male side.

CONVERSATION, NOT CONFRONTATION

Revealing yourself is not an easy task. Well, it could be if you have enough self-confidence to do so. The risk comes from not understanding yourself, understanding your motivations, or understanding the audience you are revealing yourself to. Understand your reasons. Prepare yourself for all questions and reactions. You will be asked a lot of questions... personal and probing questions. Your audience will probably have little practical experience with anyone with your gender identity, while you have had plenty of time to come to terms with it.

For Your Consideration ~

From older gay men who didn't know the term „gender non-binary“ to parents of trans-kids struggling to wrap their heads and hearts around so many nuances to what makes their kid tick, I have been surprised by how little people know others factions

within their own LGBTQ+ community. It was even more interesting to learn the trans-kids themselves are both „online“ knowledgeable in some regards and ignorant in others.

I wondered, „how is it you don't know this already?“ My assumption has always been that trans-folks are more well-rounded about LGBTQ+ topics than I am. I have to remind myself that people within the community are trying to figure themselves out, not the community at large. We tend to figure out what is important and pertinent to our own lives first.

Be patient and honest. You may find the questions you are asked will give you something to think about, too. Do not tack on your own fears and assumptions to what they ask (or what you think they mean). It is also important to remember that this is not a sprint, but a marathon. The same questions may be re-asked over several sit-downs if they are having trouble grasping the concepts of our crossdressing world. Understanding does not come with one response or, necessarily, with several responses. Sometimes, it, does not even come through with words at all.

One of Jen's favorite sayings from me is, „Show, don't tell.“ When she worried about what Savannah was really about, I didn't continue to try to persuade her with more talk. I truly took that phrase to heart and continued to demonstrate my commitment to her, to our relationship, and to elevating what Savannah was for me and for us.

Actions speak volumes louder than the most vocal and eloquent of speeches. Words are meaningless and hollow by themselves. They are fragile, their promise sometimes broken with the simplest notions of impropriety. If you hope your new dynamic will survive and thrive with your partner, they need to see that your words are a direct reflection of your actions.

When your partners make room in their closets, remember that they are both providing you more square footage in your home and in their heads and hearts. Do not make the extra space heavier with clutter than it needs to be for her — or you.

Be in the moment.

Be there for each other.

Crossdressers, please understand others' points of view. It should be easy since we seem to be more empathetic with women than the average male.

2.16. Balancing Acts

The cynic finds love with the idealist. The rebel with the conformist. The social butterfly with the bookworm. They help each other balance their lives

~ Dr. Joyce Brothers

Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.

~ Thomas Merton

STARTING LINES

In order to lead a balanced life, it is important to understand what the term means. It seems such a simple concept. But balance is like chess. It takes minutes to learn and years to master.

Imagine the statue of the blindfolded Lady Justice. She holds a scale up in her hand. The scale has a balanced arm with a pan at each end. Now visualize that it has several arms, each with a pan. Are they perfectly level with equal balance around the fulcrum? Is one being pulled down or pushed up too hard in any one direction? If one pan is out of balance, any of the others may be, as well.

Keep in mind, though, that balance doesn't come in equal weight. Each component is not measured in units of time but in quality of use. When you are in balance, you experience a sense of calm, grounding, contentment, and positivity. Crossdressing, as part of the balance of who you are, requires the same attention.

BALANCING THE SCALES

Balance exists both internally and externally. Your sense of peace is for you alone, an internal balance only you can master. Your surroundings, experiences, and the people around you comprise your external balance.

To begin with, an internal balance is the calm you master for the health of your body, mind and spirit. Below are examples of what that can mean:

- A pursuit of knowledge versus a quiet and still mind.
- The giving and receiving of love. You can only accept love if you allow it in and give it out.
- Eating well versus proper exercise. Once in a while, you need to treat yourself to... you guessed it... treats. To push the body too hard or to deny an occasional indulgent experience is a surefire way to be unbalanced.

External balance is also important. You cannot control it — only by influenced by it. Much of what you do affect is dependent on how you choose to associate with those forces. What are those external things and why are they important to your fulfillment as a person?

- Having a good job and making money? Financial goals are great, but to push too hard in business without stopping a moment to take in the grander landscape of life is not balance.

- Having a family with two and a half kids, a dog, and a picket fence? Being responsible for your family and their health, but forgetting about being responsible for yourself is not balance.
- Cutting loose out on the town having a great time with friends? If that is all you are accomplishing, you will eventually burn out. And that (say it with me) is not balance.

This all sounds too hard, Savannah! Just thinking about juggling all those things is stressing me out!

If we intended to look at every internal and external component all at once, there would be a bevy of added stress. Balance is fluid. The things providing you a sense of calm change as you evolve. Each of the elements I mentioned above is positive, but if taken to selfish extremes is not. Find out what gives you joy. Give priority to those things that make you happy — all the things that make you happy.

2.17. You Can't Handle The Truth

Truth is everybody is going to hurt you; you just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.

~ Bob Marley

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

~ Buddha

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Are you familiar with the parable of the six blind men who were set to describe a pachyderm standing in front of them? One described its rough and round legs as tree trunks. Another ran his hands along pointed ivory and thought it to be a spear. A third grabbed at a tail and considered it a rope. Yet another found the animal's trunk and recoiled with the assertion he had encountered a snake.

Those blind men were really silly, weren't they? A snake and a tree trunk... what idiots, right? Nope! They qualified their assumptions based on their existing knowledge. Each knew the truth, as they understood it. Their experience shaped how they described something new.

The same could be said about crossdressers. Many understand their own reasons for dressing in a very vague sense. Their minds piece together what they know of gay men, celebrity cases of men transitioning into women (and vice versa), and strange uncles who thought it would be a hoot to dress up as Cher for Halloween.

If someone were to ask us about the reasons why we dress, we would probably be a little defensive at the questions thrown at us.

Are you gay?

Are you a drag queen?

Do you want to be a woman?

How could they dare ask such things? Please understand these questions are typically not asked out of spite, but in a pursuit of knowledge about a part of your life unknown to them — based on the stereotypes most are aware of.

The people you choose to share your feminine side with have a right to ask any questions. And you, dear crossdresser, have a responsibility to tell them the truth to the fullest extent of your own understanding. What do you do when you don't know the answer? Don't circle „C" as suggested when taking a multiple-choice pop quiz. Tell them, „I don't know", or whatever your truth is... then explore for the answers on your own. It is our job, dear crossdressers, to help illuminate what it truly means to be who we are.

But I can't explain who I am, Savannah! I don't even understand why I do what I do.

Why not? You have been doing this crossdressing thing for either a little while or for a lifetime. Have you never reflected on the whys? I am not asking you to answer the big capital-W ‚Why'. That is a deeper question, like, „why does a gay man like men?". The big Why may be a single answer or a hundred answers... or there may be no answer at all. But to analyze what we like about it, what comfort we find in it, and what pleasures we derive from it are all

attainable answers if we decide to look for them. Living a life without understanding is a life without enlightenment.

Truth is also wisdom. Of course, truth is only as true as our understanding. If asking the question, „Why do you go to church?“, results in the answer, „Because my momma always took me...“, then are we being honest with the reasons why we hold our belief in our religion so tightly? Our perception of truth is only as good as what we *can* see and what we *choose* to see.

Those blind men, had they brought their collected wisdom together, could have postulated the answer of „an elephant“. That is also true with the truth. We may understand our own crossdressing, but have we looked outside ourselves to learn more about the community at large and multi-faceted transgenderism? Have we, as crossdressers, done any reading? Have we gotten together to share our experiences with others like us? Have we taken in information and reflected on how it fits into our own lives?

PURSUIT OF TRUTH

Continuing to use those blind men as our example, I had asked whether they would have realized the animal was an elephant if had they brought their collected wisdom together. If so, would that be the truth? Would the elephant really be an elephant?

Of course, Savannah? What else would the elephant be?

Well, true, it’s an elephant because a bunch of zoologists, way back in the day (Dane Cook says, „it was a Wednesday“), decided to classify the animal. So, assuming their classification of an animal as truth, my original question takes us back to understanding how the world works through labels.

We understand the world based on our knowledge and experience. Do we know all we need to know about what makes crossdressing men tick? Have a vast majority of crossdressing men willingly come forward to participate in an international census to create a sound profile of who we are and why we do what we do? The output would only be accurate if all the right questions were asked. Can someone (or a group of someones) ask the right questions to a crossdresser if they themselves have never had the urge to crossdress?

So, have the crossdressers compose the questions.

That wouldn’t work either, because most crossdressers only understand themselves (and even that understanding is not always complete or in-depth).

So, now what? We are going in circles.

We are going in circles, dear reader, aren’t we? Are you confused? Are you wondering where to go from here?

Yes.

Good. That is the point. Learning begins with the act of asking questions. Then, you have to be willing to truly interpret the answers and process them into an ever-expanding understanding of self. Answers should always lead to more questions. Dead ends do not exist, only opportunities to fill in the gaps. Also, we can’t deny or suppress information just because it runs contrary to our current beliefs.

Keep an open mind. Reflect on why you hold to your pre-existing beliefs. Is an elephant only a truth if it is comprised of a sum of its parts? Is the classification of the animal only truth because it is the most commonly held and accepted belief as to what it is? Or, are we constantly discovering new things about life that change the way we see things?

In the 4th century BCE[36], the Greeks believed with certainty the Earth was the center of the universe. In the 16th century, Copernicus theorized the sun was the center of the universe and the Earth orbited around it. In the last century, new galaxies have been discovered, increasing our understanding of an expanding universe and our place within it.

The Earth is held up on the shell of a giant turtle.

Not true.

Sailing ships fall off the edge of a flat Earth.

Didn't happen.

The moon is made of cheese.

A fairy tale.

Homosexuals are an evil abomination and need to be cured.

Religious dogma.

Crossdressers are all gay, dress as a fetish, and secretly want to be biological women.

Not all of us.

[36] https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Era

2.18. Why Thinking ‚What's Wrong' Is Wrong Thinking

In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.

~ Theodore Roosevelt

You got to go down a lot of wrong roads to find the right one.

~ Bob Parsons

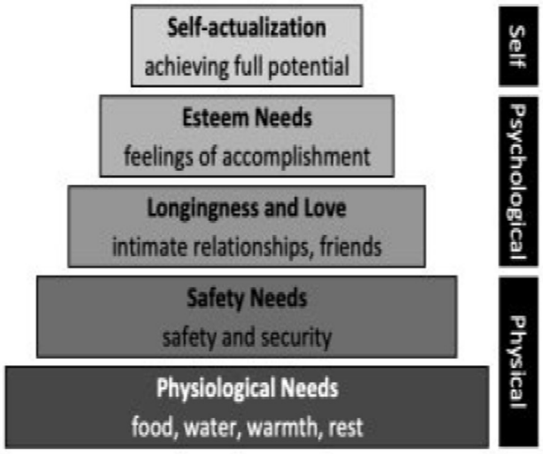
DO YOU VALIDATE?

Why do I crossdress? What's wrong with me? Popular social opinion says we are freaks, fetishists, and non-serious part-timers... they must be right, right? These are the thoughts that have indoctrinated in our heads throughout our lives. Our brains may have cautioned us against trying on that first pair of panties, even as we were drawn to pulling the sheer fabric up our legs. We may still ponder the reasons why we are *addicted* to this *lifestyle*, very sensitive to the fact we are different than most *normal* individuals.

For most of us not living in major metropolitan areas, finding others like us may be purely an online interaction. We commiserate our sameness as we sit in front of the cool glow of our laptops, our fingers poised to clickity-clack all of our intimate details to any kindred feminine spirits in cyberspace. There is a willing desperation in sharing with like-minded people, easily revealing everything about ourselves. They have been where we have been; experienced what we have experienced. They understand us... and can empathize.

Why do we so easily give up this part of ourselves to phantom online avatars while quickly repressing „us" when faced with sharing ourselves with those we care for most (in the real world)? One reason could be because we are social creatures who crave validation as human beings. We are also contemplative creatures who weigh the risks and rewards of revealing ourselves to others closest to ourselves — always with an eye to rejection. Cyberspace allows us to maintain a level of autonomy while receiving the validation we need to bolster our self-worth.

MASLOW'S PYRAMID



THE QUESTION REMAINS... why do we need external validation at all? Abraham Maslow created a theory of hierarchical need allowing for people to realize their full potential as an individual[37]. It's a pyramid, widest at the base — with our physiological needs to survive — and climbing to its peak with self-actualization[38] and creative growth beyond what is necessary to live. According to Maslow, a fulcrum exists where our motivation to achieve something new decreases as all of our needs are met. At the point of „fulfillment", we can either remain content with our achievements or become motivated to go beyond our basic needs.

The bottom band represents the basic needs of human survival. This represents safety from the elements and harm. We build ourselves rudimentary shelter and forage for food. We create a protective perimeter so we are safe from external threats. As we gain a sense of security, we have the opportunity to focus on the development of interpersonal relationships.

We look for love, as they say. We develop bonds and build our social circles. We look for others who share our beliefs, our interests, and who will care for our well-being as much as we care for theirs. As we feel safe, secure, and loved, we can then set our sights on loftier — more existential — pursuits.

This is where esteem and self-confidence come into play. When you no longer worry about eking out a basic existence, your mind branches out its focus to other hobbies or pursuits. This is where you master skills for the sake of achievement. You look for respect and a positive reputation on a personal level. This is the point where you are recognized — and validated — for your efforts. Once you have achieved your „greatness" with a job, your family, and mastery of everyday pursuits, you have reached the line straddling between those things you truly need to achieve and those things you want to achieve for your own self-fulfillment. Maslow described the peak of the pyramid as „everything one is capable of becoming".

It is all very esoteric, isn't it? Why is Maslow's theory even necessary to read about to better understand how we see ourselves in the world as crossdressers. In my opinion — and Maslow's Pyramid is only one of several psychological theories — the need for validation as crossdressers comes from the three middle layers of Maslow's pyramid, focusing on the bands of Safety, Love and Belonging, and Esteem. Once those are conquered on the crossdressing front, then you would be able to climb up to the top of the pyramid — Self-actualization.

Let's break this down, dear readers. Think about the emotional turmoil you may have faced during different events concerning your feminine persona. How did you feel when you ventured out of the house for the first time? What did it feel like to wrestle with the prospect of revealing your feminine nature to another? What about when you shared your story with other transgender individuals? I will outline where on the pyramid each of these events touched down.

Let's tackle these events one at a time.

I'M GOING OUT, I WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW

[37] https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html
[38] http://journalpsyche.org/tag/self-actualization-and-validation/

The first event — going out in public for the first time — is an amazing experience, but usually filled with terror and trepidation. I am not talking about a quick wobbly walk in heels down a dimly lit street outside your home or a drive to a park hidden within the protection of a ton of vehicular steel and tempered glass. Yes, those are scary and exhilarating moments, as well. What I am actually talking about is the first time you appeared in public in front of real flesh-and-blood people.

The idea of debuting in public touches on the three middle bands of Maslow's Pyramid. There are the issues of safety concerns, the hope for human connection, and the recognition and acceptance of those around you. A failure on any of these points will, most likely, result in a sense of failure in the experience. Many crossdressers go to gay bars and clubs as their first outings for this reason, hoping a community-friendly environment will include the Safety and Belongingness and Love bands at the onset. At that point, only the hope for Esteem would be an unknown factor.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Let's move on to the second event. Revealing your true self to another person — one who isn't inside the trans-community — is another possibly terrifying notion. The idea of it can weigh on the crossdresser's mind and heart like a broken slab of reinforced concrete. If the person to whom you are revealing your feminine self doesn't accept the prospect of having a crossdresser in their life, there is no guarantee of the bands of Safety or Belongingness and Love. That leads to the fact that the band of Esteem is not guaranteed, either. Sure, someone can respect you for the courage and strength of your convictions, but they may not necessarily provide you with a sense of connection and love.

WHO ARE YOU? I'M BATMAN!

So, we come to the third event on my list. This is, by far, the easiest of the three scenarios to experience. Sharing your story with another crossdresser, transindividual, or admirer already covers the concepts of Safety and Belongingness and Love. Even if the sense of connection is as tenuous as being in the same general 'community', an already built-in acceptance exists based on having similar stories of adversity. Because the bands of Safety, and Belongingness and Love, are built in, the notion of Esteem is also much easier to elicit. It doesn't take too long before you are sharing every intimate detail of your life as a crossdresser, sending digital selfies, and listing your plans for the future. You feel validated. You feel accepted and safe. You feel loved.

SAFETY DANCE

Most people are motivated by the acceptance of their behavior conducted in a safe environment. We crossdressers have experienced or feared the opposite. I spent many years staying at home „in the closet" for worry of what lay beyond the security of my four walls. One day, I finally gained enough confidence to face the fears rattling in my head. What if I was immediately clocked? What if people stared at me and whispered to each other behind cupped hands about what a freak I was? What if I was outed? What if I was beat up by bigots?

So, the first step was to find a safe place to be Savannah. Enter, Long Island's Femme Fever. I was able to travel in my male clothes, have a makeover and a photo shoot in my feminine form, then return to my male form without ever stepping out into the open air. I had a built-in acceptance in the form of a woman who understood crossdressers and other trans-individuals, as well as having the safe haven of the brick-and-mortar of Femme Fever itself. Femme Fever also had monthly community discussion groups where I was able to mingle with and learn from other crossdressers and trans-women about their own struggles and how they overcame them. Obviously, they had lived... since they had survived to tell me the tales.

Where did that lead me? I spent several months associating with the women in the support/discussion group as a means to find a way to become more like them. They were brave where I was cowardly. They lived life while I hid within four walls. I wanted what they had. Finally, when the battle behind my eyes had gone on for long enough, I took a deep breath and demanded of myself to be Savannah in the real world. I accomplished that by — wait for it — driving from Femme Fever to my house as Savannah! Gasp! Well, it might seem insignificant to a reader who hasn't had to face their own demons of self-acceptance, but this act of bravery was a huge step for me, making me realize the world was not filled with vile monsters as I had thought. Although, I will say for the record I was still safe behind the steel doors of a vehicle capable of outrunning them!

Next step, venturing out to a trans-friendly venue — namely, a neighborhood gay bar. With the support of my beautiful friends, Victoria and Marisol, we eventually planned an after-discussion group outing to a bar. As you may recall from the Savannah's Story chapter, the bar had unexpectedly closed down and I was faced with my arch-nemesis in the form of a convenience store filled with harsh overhead fluorescent lights! Since I am not writing this book like William Holden's screenwriter Joe Gillis in the 1950 release, *Sunset Boulevard*, you know I also lived to tell the tale.

One trip to a trans-friendly bar became two. Two trips became four. Four trips became outings to dance clubs and chowing down at late-night diners. Every step helped me to realize the world — in general — was accepting of Savannah. Or, at the very least, I learned most people were ambivalent. Sure, someone will always be offended by who you are. Certain people will always stare. Maybe they are struggling to figure out if you are actually a woman or not, or maybe you are turning heads by elevating the room with your attention to feminine detail. As long as you generate your own safe personal space, and avoid situations where you could be in jeopardy, you will find most people care more about their own lives than about yours.

LOVE CONNECTIONS

As a crossdresser, I have always struggled with the need for social acceptance, as well as learning to accept myself. It is of the utmost importance for me to be accepted by the person closest and most important to me — my partner. In order to have a healthy, productive, and evolving relationship, it is imperative for me to be able to express both my male-side and Savannah to her without fear or judgment. Otherwise, I believe our personal relationship will

always suffer because of the lack of understanding for what drives me in my dual gender expression.

It is one thing to strive for acceptance within the most intimate of personal relationships. It is wholly another to look for acceptance from society itself. Social acceptance is defined, according to Wikiquote[39], as most people — in order to fit in with others — attempting to look and act like them. Wikiquote goes on to state that, sometimes, it is the ability to accept or to tolerate differences and diversity in other people or groups of people.

Does that mean we crossdressers should conform to a societal standard currently excluding us as part of it (at least in the United States)? Aside from delving into the political climate — I hate talking politics, as you know — the trans community continues to work hard to increase their visibility, expanding relevant and true education, and becoming a part of the social norm without conforming to what it demands.

Understanding that acceptance from others is not a given or absolute, how does one go about finding acceptance and self-esteem on the social stage? As with many minority groups, acceptance doesn't occur in natural course. It came — and comes — as a result of continued persistence for civil rights, marches for human equality, and the mainstreaming of high-profile individuals. These efforts help to shed a light on something always considered taboo.

We must, as individuals, be part of that movement, too. As a crossdressing man, I enjoy the privilege of being a white-collar, middle-class Caucasian male. Savannah is not my whole life, but she is an intricate component of the whole of my being. The patriarchy provides me a safety net others in the trans-community may not enjoy. The safety has also shackled me into keeping Savannah more of a secret from others than I probably should. I am currently doing more to change my standing in the public eye. Some may see Savannah as simply a costume I put on and put away when it pleases me. Having a more concrete esteem in myself is why I put myself out in public... at the Starbucks, at the local Pride events, walking around the downtown of Spartanburg with friends. While Savannah is not my 100% all-femme, all-the-time persona, she is important enough to have a visible public presentation and a proud voice.

INVERTING THE PYRAMID

Now, let's flip Maslow's theory on its head! Are the bands of Safety or Belongingness and Love necessary to ascend to a level of self-actualization with only self-esteem powering you? We all strive for acceptance from outside sources, reveling in the support for what we think, how we present ourselves, and why we need to explore our inherent feminine nature. But, at the end of the day, we will always be left alone with our own thoughts and the desire in our hearts.

Respecting and understanding yourself as a crossdresser is extremely important for the fulfillment of self-worth. Sure, another crossdresser's admiration of your social media selfies does the ego good, but those compliments may quickly fade when facing a dysphoric mirror.

[39] https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Social_acceptance

Having confidence and self-esteem for your feminine self is accepting that you are perfect just the way you are.

Daily Affirmations:

- I am a beautiful creature.
- I recognize joy in life, both as a man and as a woman.
- I share my joy and love to those around me.
- I strive to be my best, and see that others are doing the same.
- I strive to be compassionate.
- I see the beauty in everything — in myself, in my surroundings, and with the people I meet.
- I accept who I am, not who people expect me to be.
- I love the joy I have and am happy to share.
- My smile, empathy, and sympathy will go far.

2.19. Why Fear Never Disappears

You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‚I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

~ Nelson Mandela

THE PURPOSE OF FEAR

According to Tom Morris, author of *The Oasis Within*[40], the purpose of fear is to motivate action — often avoidance, sometimes preparation, always a new level of focused concentration. When we're trying something new — where great gains or losses are at stake — fear will often arise.

Fear — as it relates to my crossdressing — has been a constant companion. From the worry of being caught in my parents' bedroom, to being discovered in my sister's clothes, to being accosted in public while expressing my alternative gender, that single emotion was always present. Simon and Garfunkel sang, ‚Hello, Darkness, my old friend'. Fear is a powerful emotion that exists to keep us safe from harm or pain. Some think fear exists only to paralyze us into inaction — like a deer in the headlights. Actually, fear is more aptly described as ‚fight or flight'.

PLANTING A SEED

We are the culmination of our upbringing, environment, education, and indoctrinations. Growing up, I had never seen another boy dress up as a girl. My only references were a cartoon Bugs Bunny dressed as an operatic Valkyrie or southern belle. Tom Hanks' starred in *Bosom Buddies* in 1980 and Dustin Hoffman's *Tootsie* was released in 1982. By then, I was eleven-years-old and well into my personal feminine journey.

Each episode of my early dressing was done in secret. I didn't know how to feel about it, other than knowing it was not a normal part of a little boy's life. My parents commented on several occasions about how the boy across the street was probably gay, saying the G-word in a negative way. If he was to be judged and ridiculed — even in passing by my parents — my activities in girl's clothes would, in my opinion, have been seen as much worse a proclivity. And, no, I didn't know the word ‚proclivity' until way later in life!

With the vocal dissent from my parents about the neighborhood boy, no comparative information about other boys who liked to dress up in their sister's bathing suits, and my instinct of self-preservation, I had more than enough reasons to keep my feminine persona to myself.

---

[40] http://www.tomvmorris.com/blog/2015/8/3/the-purpose-of-fear

That went on for several years. Even as I started dating and became sexually active, I continued to keep my crossdressing to myself. Surprisingly, as one would expect, the reckless bravery of my adolescence eventually led to me broaching the subject of my crossdressing to one of my girlfriends. It was a new idea for the both of us. It was a taboo idea. She let me wear her prom dress once. We both wore the same lingerie — in turn — on another occasion. Our blossoming sexuality was a wonderful thing. And, yes, as with anything new when it came to teenage sexuality, it was both an amazing and awkward experience.

Ironically, sharing my love of crossdressing with my girlfriend didn't give me confidence to reveal myself to my friends or family. A wall of fear had been built up over those formative years, not easily demolished by the acceptance and trust of a single girlfriend. Fear stayed my lips from sharing who I was. That fear would only build up further with examples of disdain for how crossdressing was portrayed in the media, condemned in the church, or spoken about with intolerance and ignorance at home.

WEDDED BLISS

Even with the promise of a bright future with college and career prospects, my expanding wings for what my crossdressing could become were, unfortunately, quickly clipped. I met a woman who would eventually become my wife. We were young and in love — code for dumb. I had been looking for a better life, both with geographic relocation and the pursuit of a higher tax bracket.

She had verbalized her disdain for the gay and lesbian community. She had told me about a boyfriend who had come out to her as gay and had mentioned several times how uncomfortable it made her feel when women hit on her. Looking back, I should have never gotten married... but love is love, right?

I did fully reveal my crossdressing after we married (still barely understanding my gender identity). Up to that point, I denied that I liked to dress in feminine clothing. I had willingly walked myself into a painted corner of disapproval and judgment. I guess I didn't know any better. I wanted to be loved and I thought I was willing to sacrifice my strange crossdressing obsession in order to lead a normal life.

After the reveal, we didn't discuss Savannah much. We did, however, have one evening where she agreed to participate in intimacy with me while I was dressed in a feminine way. I spent Saturday at the local adult novelty boutique looking for an outfit to wear, to another place to find a wig (a terrible choice), and then to a drug store for makeup I understood very little about how to apply.

When we were ready (as we could be), the encounter quickly soured. Mostly because my heightened anticipation was met with a lukewarm reception. I had assumed she was invested in the feminine experiment. Alas, it was not to be... and I retreated back to the safety of my own mind and self-imposed closet. As you may recall from Savannah's Story, my wife eventually revealed to me she was sexually attracted to genetic women. We agreed to a trade-

off. I let her discover her sexuality and she let me pursue my crossdressing development. Eventually, we divorced.

UNDERSTANDING THE FEAR

I apologize. I went off track a bit to reminiscence about my young wedded years. To summarize, I showed fear early on because I was afraid of being rejected by the woman I loved. Once I gained enough courage to tell her about my crossdressing — and had enough time under my belt in our relationship to believe we could weather any challenge — I succumbed to fear again when I received her disapproval of it. Sure, some of the disapproval was from her reaction to how I conducted myself with the delayed reveal, but much of it was the rejection I had manufactured in my head based on a lifetime of experience.

What was true once must be true again, right? This mantra has, unfortunately, stayed with me throughout my life. We reinforce the theories in our head with everything supporting them, but ignore anything running contrary to them. Breaking the self-imposed chains of fear, denial, and low self-esteem are essential for personal growth. Fear can stunt your growth as a crossdressing man and as a person in total.

Savannah, how can I possibly overcome being scared of what could happen to me as a crossdresser?

What keeps us in fear? Why does our primitive ‚fight or flight' emotional response continue to have such a powerful effect on us? Because it IS a primitive instinct, evolved over millennia to ensure our continued survival. The modern-day problem facing us is a human brain that continues to listen to this instinct, even after the need to protect ourselves from sabretooth tigers has become extinct. The mind is fascinating in its intellect, but senseless in its continued regression to some more primitive states.

BECOME WONDER WOMEN

So, how do we overcome such a powerful visceral force? The following tips from Geoffrey James[41], a contributing editor at Inc.com, were written about overcoming fear from a corporate and career point of view. These are simple tricks, in theory, that take practice to make habit.

The first thing is to replace your sense of security with a sense of courage. As James puts it, people will suffer in crappy jobs and failing marriages because the prospect of making change isn't as easy as the known comfort of the current situations. We become rooted in our tight circle of comfort and known discomfort, seeing everything beyond it as terrors in the dark. To face those scary unknowns is to put ourselves into situations where we bare ourselves to possible hurt, rejection, or harm (physically, emotionally, or mentally).

It takes bravery to step outside your comfort zone, but once you do your circle will widen and will, eventually, become your new comfort zone. The more steps you take away from your center of comfort, the wider your circle of comfort becomes. The more steps you take, the more courage you find within you.

---

[41] https://www.inc.com/geoffrey-james/how-to-conquer-fear-4-mentaltricks. html

Recognize the fear your brain has manufactured. You sometimes feel fear in situations having nothing to do with the threat of physical pain or harm. For example, you may fear telling your wife you ate a Snickers Bar on the way home from work, knowing she had dinner waiting for you. You fear the possible reprisal that may occur. In another example, you may keep yourself from starting your own business, fearing the venture may ultimately fail and that you won't have enough money to pay your bills.

The above situations are stating somewhat irrational fears — one based on possible confrontation and the other based on the assumption of assured failure. Other fears may take the form of simple prudence, such as the fear of driving aggressively because of the worry of an auto accident. While it is good to be cautious about next steps, do not allow yourself to be cowed into thinking an irrational fear is just practicality.

Secondly, use the emotional power of fear to propel you into a call of action. Many people use fear as an excuse to remain stagnant, to be paralyzed with inaction. ‚I don't want to make that call'... ‚I don't want to ask my boss for a raise'... ‚I can't reveal to my wife I like to dress in her clothes every time she's visiting her sister'.

Some things are within your control, others are not. If you ask your boss for a raise, what is the worst that can happen? They take your request and reasons into account and eventually get back to you with a ‚no'? Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Crossdressing can be the same thing.

I understand revealing your crossdressing nature to friends and family is a very scary proposition. But, as stated above, if you truly understand who you are and prepare the revelation with earnestness and grace (maybe a well-crafted letter for them to read in private), the outcome may be more favorable than your fear has allowed you to believe. Remember, there is a difference between irrational fear and a thorough risk assessment. I am not telling every crossdressing man to finish this chapter and go tell his unsuspecting wife or family. I am telling you, instead, that fear should not be a paralysis but a reason for analytics.

Lastly, be excited. Harness fearful energy and turn it into an opportunity. We fear those things we do not understand or anticipate. Turn that frown upside down. The idea of a rollercoaster is scary. Thinking about skydiving is terrifying. The prospect of going outside your front door wearing the clothes of the opposite gender would bring any man to his knees in defeat! Thinking the worst will make the worst come true — even if only in your mind. Make the outing a glorious challenge. Take extra time to get your makeup just right. Adjust your blouse and wear amazing jewelry. Bask in the „becoming" and revel in the fact you are as strong a woman as you are a man. Take your feminine presentation as a badge of pride and walk out the door with your chest out and your head held high.

2.20. Why Crossdressing is Still Conforming

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth.

~ John F. Kennedy

ISN'T IT IRONIC? DON'T YOU THINK?

Conformity is described as having behavior in accordance with socially accepted conventions or standards[42]. The idea of conformity as it relates to crossdressing is an ironic one. While we operate outside the accepted societal norms (and, sometimes, at the fringes of the LGBTQ+ community itself), we each have our own perceived standard of the perfect feminine archetype.

I believe most crossdressers — from fetishists to the everyday wanderers — have a preferred visage of femininity. Any poke onto a crossdressing man's social media wall will reveal hundreds of thumb-numbing photos presenting their best version of a womanly form. From corsetry and garters out of the Victorian Era to the modern casual fashions of women in leggings and Uggs, our interpretation of feminine expression is imprinted from a catalog of historically and socially accepted constructs. So, the notion we are non-conformists operating outside the social mainstream is a view that is a tad askew.

LEAVE IT TO BEAVER

I met a crossdresser who flew to New York once every couple of months for the private Femme Fever Long Island parties. She preferred to be decked out in outfits June Cleaver would have been envious of. She wore the thicker dress material, pearls, and modest low-heel pumps which were a signature of the 1950's middle-class feminine aesthetic.

Although she chose to wear a socially accepted fashion several decades old, walking into the lobby of a modern-day Applebee's restaurant would still draw glances. First, because the fashion — while done well — is well out-of-date (as mentioned). Second, the initial attention to the fashion could result in closer scrutiny and of her being „clocked" as a man dressed as a woman.

Our feminine personas come from many sources. Some prefer a retro gothic look. Others love wearing Spandex blends. I know of another who loves the idea of Hugh Hefner's world of Playboy Bunnies — ears, tail, and all. Each man reinvents themselves into what they consider their ultimate ideal in feminine presentation. Whether or not the overall style is appropriate for the aforementioned restaurant may be immaterial to them.

BEAUTY BOUNDARIES

[42] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conformity

In order to function in society, we still need to conform to certain „acceptable“ standards and practices. Dressing only in lacy lingerie, while completely acceptable in your bedroom, wouldn't be received very well in public. Real women — or, maybe, an uber-passable crossdressing man — can get away with more risqué fashions.

The unfortunate truth is that perceived beauty both helps to define what is considered socially acceptable and relegates that acceptability to women of that stature. The more feminine and beautiful the wearer, the more accepted their chosen fashion is. Striking women can wear corsets under their blazers. They can slide into stretch leather pants tight enough to allow the date on the face of the dime in their back pocket to be read. A woman's beauty is always on public display, ripe for ogling, admiration and scrutiny.

Crossdressers are bound to the same rules of accepted beauty. In order to blend into the fabric of society, we have been conditioned to adhere to the socially accepted tenets of feminine fashion (to some degree). In this way, we are conformists. The more streamlined our feminine presentation, the less attention we draw to ourselves. The more graceful our stride and comportment, the less others tend to subconsciously pick up those manly physical cues in the periphery of their vision. If we camouflage ourselves in the accepted fashions of the day and the venue, we can, hopefully, exist under the radar of Jane and John Q. Public.

BEAUTIFUL IS BETTER

Socially accepted feminine beauty is always going to be a bonus to a crossdresser when presenting out in public. It's an unfortunate fact that the slighter of frame, daintier, and naturally curvier a crossdresser is, the more easily they will slip by in public without notice. Being more passable is, sometimes, an easier „sell“ to partners, friends and family.

I spoke recently to Jen about how she felt about me in terms of my acceptability and passability as Savannah. On our first night of my full, in person, feminine reveal to her, she told me, „You are very pretty,“ and, „You don't look like yourself.“ So, to her, I could pass as a woman. Her comments set the stage for a later discussion about how the success of my feminine presentation could directly affect her willingness to tell her family about my dual identities. Jen told me my well put-together presentation as Savannah was a benefit. She said that, „if I didn't work so hard on my feminine presentation, I would be a harder sell to her family...“ and that, „...being more passable makes it easier to share your crossdressing because the risk of embarrassment is lower. Telling family and friends — with the chance of seeing them snicker behind their hands — would make it more difficult to defend you.“

That being said, not every crossdressing man has the physique of a female super model. Not everyone is going to spend months perfecting a feminine voice. Not everyone is going to log enough makeup time to get noticeably better at its application, regardless of how many YouTube video tutorials they watch. Sometimes, a successful presentation is less about how closely you match Tyra Banks and more about how you conduct and carry yourself.

For Your Consideration ~

While the above comments are an unfortunate truth about accepted and revered feminine beauty, it is not the end-all, be-all answer to how you should see yourself. I am

a huge proponent of the belief that there is beauty in everyone and, if you carry yourself with grace, confidence, and your best efforts, that singular beauty will radiant more brightly than anything else.

FIGHT THE POWER

So, we are not anarchists. We are not railing against the system, raging against the machine, or fighting against the Man. We are just trying to find out who we are and live our fullest lives. Some of us may never leave the safety of our personal space. Others will go out with confidence, publically presenting their feminine personas. As more and more of us step out into the world — with a positive attitude — we will change hearts and minds along the way.

We crossdressers conform to our perceived feminine standards, even though the current social climate within the United States still fights against us on the principle of not understanding us. We fear „The People“ because we believe only intolerance and pain waits for us in public. They fear us because they don’t understand why we do what we do, and why we feel a need to „masquerade“ around in the costumes of the opposite gender.

For Your Consideration ~

Looking at many Facebook posts with comments by crossdressing and transgender dissenters, it has been written that crossdressers are nothing more than sexual deviants and kinky perverts, child molesters, mentally ill, and moral abominations. Be mindful of these opinions as you strive to gain acceptance in your social circles. These may not be the perspectives of the people in and around your social circle, but these opinions exist. Many people live their lives with inherent beliefs different than yours, making acceptance from them an uphill battle.

2.21. Halloween – The Crossdressers' Christmas

If human beings had genuine courage, they'd wear their costumes every day of the year, not just on Halloween.

~ Douglas Coupland

I love costumes. I love getting dressed up because it really helps my imagination make the leap to believe that I am who I say I am.

~ Alessandro Nivola

HALLOWEEN – AN ESSAY

Many have designated Halloween as the one American holiday where closeted male-to-female crossdressers get enough courage to venture out of the house dressed in a feminine guise. A sexy woman... the gender-bending female half of a couple's costume theme... an exaggerated cartoony parody like Jessica Rabbit. Since it is fast becoming synonymous that closeted CD men use Halloween as an excuse to publicly present in a feminine form, the act of dressing has become a double-edged sword. What will people say? Will they assume the man is dressing as a parody... or outing themselves as a crossdresser... with their feminine costume?

For Your Consideration ~

Just this year, while in New York for the New York Comic Con, I was preparing for my Day 4 cosplay as a gender-bending superheroine. My girlfriend's son-in-law was quite adamant that my „dressing as a woman was becoming a theme" and that, maybe, I „liked was crossdressing once a year". My answer to him was, „Yes" to all.

Of course, the examples above allow for us crossdressers to skirt (no pun intended) under the radar of co-workers, friends and family members who may get the „wrong idea" about us dressing up as the opposite gender. Being a part of a funny gender-swap couple's costume theme (Sonny and Cher, Mark Antony and Cleopatra, etc.) can cast doubt into outside speculation because onlookers see that our female partner is fully onboard with the theme. Therefore, she must be in on the joke.

That concept — the gag — could lead to a second gender-bending costume. Whether dressing up as an over-feminized version of a 1950s housewife or an overly-sensualized Jessica Rabbit, it will typically be viewed as parody. If you strut around with jokes and confidence, people do not question your intentions.

Of course, if your make-up is flawless or you have your feminine curves too well positioned and defined, it is possible you will be accused of being a drag queen or crossdresser. And, if you are like me, and you dress as a female character every year, it may become more and more evident to some you have a preference for a certain feminine style. Ironically, my co-workers now expect me to outdo previous years' costumes, sometimes to the point of declaring a formal challenge.

I remember dressing up as part of a four-person theme where the two women dressed up as pimps and another male co-worker and I dressed as their „working girls“. One of the graphic designers in my department helped me with my eye makeup, remarking I was so easy to work with — especially with her eyeliner pencil so close to my waterline. Ironically, it was very difficult to „unlearn“ my makeup skills for the occasion. I struggled to dumb down my make-up application in order to not draw too much attention to my „advanced“ skills.

Dressing up for the office was not all fun and affirming giggles. I heard negative statements from a specific male co-worker saying, „I can't look at you while you're dressed that way“. I won't lie and say I was okay with his comments, but worse was when he reiterated the same sentiment to my girlfriend when I wasn't around to hear it.

All in all, though, the experience was positive. One member of our International Sales Department put hard candies in my top to create more extruded nipples for his camera selfie. Another male co-worker — completely out of character — actually slapped me on the ass. I was both amused and stunned, but tried to take it all in stride. Now, in recent years, other members of the company have made comments voicing their disappointment I didn't wear something more feminine and outlandish. Go figure.

As in life, this type of quasi-„coming out“ during Halloween festivities is a popular way to embrace your feminine side. It could offer an outlet beyond the normal shackles during other parts of the year. The holiday dampens the stigma of revealing your authentic self to the people around you. Or, it could be a way to ease your feminine side into a more public level of existence.

How you want to be perceived by others is up to you. You cannot control the initial reactions of others, but you can, however, change those same hearts and minds by being the upbeat and positive person others have already come to know. While wearing a costume may make you feel different — more sensual, more confident, more powerful — be sure to always embrace the best parts of yourself.

A REASON TO BE

Halloween is, as you may have discerned, Savannah's favorite holiday. I love my birthday. Christmas is pretty cool, too. Thanksgiving is a belly-busting gluttony of wonderful food and fellowship! But, Halloween... this holiday is one where Savannah can actively participate under the breezy warmth of the autumn sun and without the unwanted scrutiny of the general populace.

I try to be thrifty with my costumes. I assemble or build something for the New York Comic Con every October. Is Comic Con a holiday, too? At any rate, I typically recycle those efforts from earlier in the month for any Halloween-related costume parties or office contests. And, since the costumes for the comic cons are usually of the super heroic gender-bending variety, I have the opportunity to parade my femininity around without a complete breakdown in the social spectrum.

Why is that? Why is it acceptable for a man to dress as a woman on Halloween?

I don't really know. In the current social climate, it is becoming more and more acceptable to dress as something utterly different from our everyday public selves. Young women have been dressing as sexy nurses, sexy witches, and any character having „sexy" as part of the title for generations. Halloween provides the opportunity to shed off the shackles of inhibitions for one night.

While men may fantasize about what it means for women to dress so provocatively on this specific day, the next day things are typically back to normal. The same can be said for a man dressing as a woman for Halloween. Whether as an exaggerated parody of femininity or a convincing portrayal of a celebrity or female stereotype, people do not think too hard about how you dress on Halloween (unless that style of dress continues on a daily basis).

I have had serious discussions with my co-workers about make-up application and women's fashion. It all stems from me taking my gender-bending cosplay very seriously. It also because I have won first and second place in the office costume contest the past two years (as Marvel's Black Widow and Scarlet Witch, respectively). It's interesting to note my masculine Punisher costume did not place in the top three at all.

Co-workers have dared me to go bigger and more elaborate each year. They expect me to outdo what I have already done. If they had wondered about my make-up skills, no one had mentioned anything. If they had wondered about whether I was a crossdresser because of my proficiency, I had not heard any strange whispers.

Halloween is the perfect holiday to throw caution to the wind and go out in public as a woman. It may be a terrifying prospect, but you will have the camouflage of the festivities to mask your true intentions. A holiday contest at work or a costume party hosted by friends gives you an opportunity to enjoy compliments and comradery. This moment of public feminine exposure builds self-confidence, allowing you to glimpse what the world could be like in a guise of feminine illusion.

The first time I dressed as a female superhero for the New York Comic Con in early October, I faced the all-too-real concern of appearing in broad daylight at one of the Long Island Railroad train stations as a slinky blond heroine in thigh-high boots and what could be considered little more than a one-piece bathing suit.

Luckily, I found most people — while some may have been amused — content to stare at their newspapers, phones, or coffee cups. While I had braced for gawkers, I was surprised no one cared that Ms. Marvel was waiting for the next Manhattan-bound express train. Attending the comic convention showed me how most people react to the unexpected. The holiday of Halloween can serve as the same experience for you... use it as a way to step up your public feminine presentation.

2.22. Facing the Public

Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.

~ Dale Carnegie

Every country faces its own obstacles to reaching gender equality, and to make a real difference, we must change public policies in tandem with stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors.

~ Jose Angel Gurria

THE HARD QUESTIONS

I've heard — and I am sure you have, too — so many questions about crossdressing from people and partners over the years.

- Why can't we be happy with what God gave us?
- Why do we have to act different from everyone else?
- Why do we have to leave the house?
- Why do have to tell people?
- Why... why... why?

When we share our true selves, we need to be prepared to field questions from people who have zero reference point on the matter. That is not to say, though, their questions are not appropriate or thought-provoking. Many times, we do not feel we have a very intelligent response. How do you field a question like, „why can't you be happy with what God gave you?"

GOD COMPLEX

„Why can't you be happy with what God gave you?" typically translates to, „why can't you accept the gender you were assigned at birth?" Understanding God's Will is like trying to understand quantum mechanics without an advanced degree in Astro-Physics.

In the Gender Rebels podcast episode, „Does God Make Mistakes?"[43], Cat and Faith discuss the obvious caveat in the aptly-titled concept. In the case of crossdressers or other trans-people suffering from gender dysphoria, there are those who feel the psychological condition should be corrected or these sinful thoughts should be „converted" to Godly ones. But, if God never make mistakes, then shouldn't medical science stop correcting cleft palates, enlarged hearts, and other physical maladies people have suffered from since birth? If God makes no mistakes and people were created as male and female, why are people born as intersex?

A deeper question is whether having feelings of being in the wrong body is a choice or is a mandate by that same perfect God. Is it appropriate to ask me to suppress my feelings of femininity simply because I was born a genetic man? Maybe, my perfect God wants me to be the way I am. Am I just twisting things around so the answer works in my favor? Maybe. Maybe

[43] https://www.podbean.com/eu/pb-6tmgc-a41afe

not. But, you can see just how tenuous this line of questioning can be once you invoke the mysteries of God's Will and our interpretation of it.

My belief is that I am living my life as truthfully as I can, always examining the mysteries before me. „An unexamined life", as Socrates lectured, „is not worth living". I try to leave my mind open for what truths are just beyond my sight — hidden behind the thin smoky veil of ignorance or misinformation — waiting to be discovered. If I assess my life on a daily basis, and I make the decision to allow no harm to myself or others, couldn't that also be considered God's Will?

If the Christian God is all-knowing, omnipresent, and omnipotent — and we have free will and the ability to make our own moral decisions — wouldn't that mean God already knows all our past, present and future successes and failings as a human being? Wouldn't every decision I will ever make have already been seen and recorded by God?

I try to do no harm. I try not to belittle others. I try not to judge people based on their skin color, political views, gender preferences or religious beliefs. I try to be a good human being. Strangely, at times, it seems the concept of being a good human being has become lost on people. The staunch belief that using exclusionary tactics and launching attacks on gender- and sexually-alternative people is honoring God's Will seems, to me, outside of His teachings.

BELIEF SYSTEM

Do you even believe in God, Savannah?

I was raised in a Lutheran-faith home. I was baptized as an infant and confirmed as a youth into the faith. I went to church and Bible-study each Sunday, learning God's Word and understanding how I fit into the tapestry that was His grand design for my life. As with many youths, I stepped away from the Church in search of a higher education, a career and a family. I did return to a nondenominational Church many years later, but their sermons eventually started to clash with my own beliefs, as well. Preaching conditional love of others is no better than teaching about having no love at all.

If God made me a man with feminine feelings, I guess he meant for me to struggle with them. Am I supposed to suppress my need to wear women's clothing or am I supposed to embrace it and advocate for others who are struggling in a similar manner? The passages below describe my Google search for the keywords „Bible" and „crossdress". The first passage speaks of men and women being condemned for wearing the accepted clothing of the other's gender. I have also heard this passage can mean men and women should not falsify their appearance or identity for ill gain.

„A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."

~ Deuteronomy 22:5

If this passage is to be accepted as written, then there are many modern women who are breaking this „law" every day. Ironically, it is interesting to note that the concept of male

and female garb is a very varied idea in cultures across the globe — both in ancient times and in the modern era.

The next passage did not speak to crossdressing at all, but advised women should dress modestly and in a way not drawing attention to them. They should be dressed plainly and should be noticed for their works — not their appearance.

„Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness — with good works.“

~ 1 Timothy 2:9-10

The last passage I located spoke about the abominations of male homosexuality, not crossdressing. But, yet, the Catholic Church and the Pope have softened their objections on homosexuality in recent years. So, if the Pope is the earpiece and the voice box of God Himself, is the Bible to be taken as literally as some seem to believe?

„If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.“

~ Leviticus 20:13

When I performed the same Google search for „acceptance“, I found a long list of Bible passages and verses talking about tolerance, patience, acceptance, kindness, and teaching. My favorite is the opening phrase within Matthew 7:1-29.

„Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‚Let me take the speck out of your eye‘, when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye...“

~ Matthew 7:1-29

„Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these...“

~ Matthew 6:25-32

„Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a

complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.“

~ Colossians 3:12-14

Why should anyone take it upon themselves to judge the motives and drives of another individual? If no laws have been broken and no harm has come to person or property, why does an individual believe it is in their personal purview to persecute men for presenting themselves as women? I am not a theologian. I do not claim to understand the nuances of God’s written Word in the Bible. But, if you ask me, an overwhelming list of passages speak more of loving one another with compassion then it does about judging those in the LGBT+ community.

Scripture says that God will judge all people who come before Him. Wouldn’t that be good enough for the rest of us? Why is there such an inherent separation between Western religion’s stance of “love thy neighbor” and their continued harsh opinion of people with gender and sexuality diversity?

STAY-AT-HOME CROSSDRESSER

Yeah... God’s Word... heavy stuff.

Let’s gravitate to a topic closer to home... literally. I mean, can we answer with certainty why we aren’t content to simply dress as our female personas at home? Some men only dress alone in their bedrooms or behind locked hotel suite doors — even to the point where they mail a box of feminine things to the hotel in advance. They refine their looks and post pics on their secret social media accounts. The idea of being a woman outside the home can conjure up trepidation and fear. Or, maybe, it does not even occur to them that an existence in public is a realistic aspiration.

For me, going out into the world is very necessary. My girlfriend, Jen, has asked me several times, „why do you need to go out?“ Each time, I come back with an answer of, „because!“ It is not a truly defendable retort, though, is it? No kid ever responded positively to mom when she told them, „because I said so.“ It was one of those questions requiring a bit of introspection.

I knew why she asked the question. That was the easy part. She was, and is still, worried for my safety. She doesn’t want anything bad to happen to me. A great big biased world creates too many variables and unknowns. My understanding of her motivations for asking the question was important. Instead of perceiving her question as disapproval for my need to be Savannah, I realized she only wants me to come home to her at the end of the evening — in one piece.

Knowing the reasoning behind the question, though, did nothing in terms of understanding my needs for going outside the home. So, as with anything of this level of importance, I put the query to the side and allowed time for my subconscious to mull it over. Eventually, an answer did present itself.

PUBLIC DISPLAYS

Why do I need to go out in public as Savannah?

Hmmm.

Becoming Savannah for an evening of card games or Netflix binge-watching always leaves me with a nagging feeling that the dress-up is a cheat. By that, I mean my feminine dressing at home is a pinprick reminder of the fear of a contemptuous world against me. Hiding at home, to me, is an admission I am not brave enough to face the world. Thinking of Savannah as something mollified by getting a ‚fix' at home is thinking of her as less a part of who I am and more as a thing that needs to be aired out once in a while.

Savannah is not a thing; she is a part of who I am as a living and breathing person. There should be no fear in that fact, even if threats still exist out in the world to be faced.

As usual, I find myself talking about fear. It has been an almost inherent part of my crossdressing existence. If we become too comfortable staying at home to dress up — giving up the notion of a public life — we may start to believe the hype that we never wanted to venture outside in the first place.

At some point, each of us may find ourselves staring at the door or looking out the window, wondering what it would be like to be ‚out there'. Of course, the fear we had built up (while only dressing at home) will try to shackle us behind our bedroom door. I am not saying you should ignore common sense and abandon your finely-honed instrument of self-preservation. What I am saying is that the world, while peppered with bigoted and ignorant people, is mostly made up of people who want to feel as safe and accepted as you.

Surround yourself with people open to the positivity and possibilities of life. They do not have to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community. They do not have to understand who you are and why you exist. They only have to have an open mind and the ability to accept those different than themselves.

I AM NOT AN ANIMAL!

As you may recall, I had referred to crossdressing as a sickness. I do NOT share that as one of my reasons for why I want to dress as a woman. I do NOT believe I have a mental illness or condition forcing me to become Savannah. There was no trauma in my childhood shaping my need for feminine escape. I am just me. And, for me, that is reason enough.

In all honesty, there can be an alluring component to dressing in pretty things. While I don't dress as a sexual come-on, I do like what I see in the mirror when I become Savannah. I feel complete. Is it an addiction, though? I don't know. While I have a *need* to be Savannah — it can affect my mood if I go too long without giving her an outlet — I don't walk around on a daily basis hating my male life.

I am a spiritual person, believing in some form of higher power. I do not hold to any modern religious organization that considers Savannah an abomination to the Will of God. According to the church, I am debasing myself by focusing on my own wants and desires versus giving myself over to God. I cannot give myself over to a deity who, in the same breath, offers compassion to all but condemnation to specific undesirable. The flavor of hypocrisy always

has left a very bitter taste on my tongue. Our feminine and masculine gender duality is just a part of who we are. We don't go out to hurt anyone. We only want to live normal and productive lives... being true to ourselves.

2.23. Are Crossdressers Good Advocates?

The weapon of the advocate is the sword of the soldier, not the dagger of the assassin.

~ Alexander Cockburn

I'm an advocate of ‚it's not what you are, it's who you are'.

~ Sia

WHAT IT TAKES TO ADVOCATE

Advocates are passionate and fiery about their beliefs. They willingly face harsh criticisms, protesters, and failure as they speak for their cause and march against injustices. They are the public face to a throng of people holding the same ideals. According to inclusionbc.org[44], an effective advocate could be outlined as having the following attributes:

They

- are organized.
- know the facts.
- have identified a cause to pursue.
- have identified key decision makers for and against the issue.
- use a respectful and assertive communication style.
- foster support when needed.

Even if one could find familiarity with the above skillset, the majority of people do not find a calling in advocacy. They will leave the championing to those they imagine are more passionate about a cause. That does speak negatively about you.

Heck, according to the outline above, I would not consider myself an advocate, either. I do not think I have the charisma needed to give a rousing speech in front of a crowd of ten people or a thousand people. I worry I would crumble against the onslaught of counter attacks by people spouting opposing legal precedent or religious scripture.

OUT FROM UNDER A ROCK

Why are there not more male crossdresser advocates? First, so many crossdressers dress only in private and are not ready to pierce the veil of secrecy and security provided by home or hotel. Why ruin the feminine experience by walking directly into public scrutiny? Of the smaller percentage of men that do go out dressed, some of those only go to trans-friendly private events. That leaves an even smaller group who enjoy going out to mainstream venues. So, how many in that last group could be counted on to find a vocation in advocacy?

And, then, the question is, „why would a crossdresser need to be an advocate to begin with?" We have no dogs in the race, no skin in the game, no wagers on the dark horse. We do not need to fight for equal rights for our crossdressing selves because we do not typically live as our crossdressing personas for more than a couple evenings a week. Why should we need

[44] https://inclusionbc.org/our-resources/parent-handbook/

to educate the masses when we can quickly and easily take off our makeup and return to our lives as productive male-privileged citizens?

ERASING THE CROSSDRESSER[45]

While the LGBTQ+ community has their warriors fighting for equal rights for civil liberties, covered healthcare procedures, and so much more, the crossdressing community has been relatively quiet. Some feel the existence of male-to-female crossdressers muddy the waters for the advancement of community needs and agendas (the word *agenda* is not meant in a derogatory way, mind you). Many feel crossdressing is only a ‚means to an end' for a transitioning gender, not a description of a person. Please remember that crossdressing is not simply an act, but a part of who we are as human beings.

We have a unique perspective worthy of education and advocacy. I hope that the words in this book are helpful. We crossdressers are typically binary in our gender presentations, while being non-binary in our gender identities. Alternative gender presentation permanence is not the end goal for us. We do not have a desire to change our biology further than in superficial cosmetic ways, only wanting the ability to quickly transform from our masculine persona to our feminine one.

We have the benefit of all that being a man offers. I am not saying all crossdressing men hold powerful positions in high-profile corporations, but I am saying that being a seemingly cis-male in everyday life goes a long way in numbing the sting from any plights we may face while in our female presentations. Because we seldom worry about losing our male privileges, most of us do not feel a need to champion for those things already provided to us.

SO... WHAT'S THE POINT?

So, apparently, crossdressers do not need to be vocal advocates for a cause we do not feel exists. While gays, lesbians and transsexual men and women continue to struggle for their own civil liberties and medical needs, crossdressers are like ghosts appearing and disappearing like wisps of morning fog burning off with the first warm rays of the sun. But, while we, as a group, can blend back into the fabric of everyday life, we shouldn't excuse ourselves from the educational process.

While we may not require help in the political arena (yet), we do need to foster the education of the general populace of the crossdressing spectrum. I have read many articles written by other LGBTQ+ advocates too-narrowly defining what a crossdresser is (according to their point of view as a non-crossdresser). I have met too many people whose first questions are still „... you aren't gay? Really?" and „... you really don't want to be a woman?" and „... that's like drag, right?". Yes, many people who are crossdressers may eventually discover a new path for their gender identity and sexuality. Yes, many crossdressers engage in the lifestyle as purely a sexual fetish. But, that does not describe all crossdressers. Non-transitioning, non-fetish male crossdressers are plentiful and simply dress as a way to express their female sides.

---

[45] https://www.quora.com/Have-trans-activists-erased-the-existence-of-crossdressers

A vast chasm of misunderstanding exists even within the LGBTQ+ community about what makes crossdressers who they are. Because we do not follow a necessarily linear progression — and because we are not easily defined and having a distinct Point A and Point B — we will continue to be a mysterious group difficult to fully decipher. That will be the case until such point when and where we speak up about what it means to be a male-to-female crossdresser.

I shed light on the subjects I still struggle to understand. I am not fully versed in all types of transgenderism and still need to look up terms being coined and popularized to describe sub groups within the community. I have to reach out to individuals who exhibit specific crossdressing habits (infant, sissies, submissives, etc.) because I cannot guarantee my own knowledge is near complete enough to provide a proper discourse for you, dear reader.

But, the fact remains... we all need to be advocates for the crossdressing community. Otherwise, we rely on others to carry the torches we are ultimately responsible for. We should not expect those who may not understand us well enough, or understand our needs, to advocate on our behalf. We need to be the ones to share our stories with the world.

2.24. A Semblance of Normality

Normality is death.

~ Theodor Adorno

Normality is to be different. Every person is a different person. And one day you need to be aware of your difference. Aware that you are not the same as the others. That is to be normal.

~ Alejandro Jodorowsky

ROOT, ROOT, ROOT FOR THE HOME TEAM

Have you ever sat across the table from your neighbors and chatted the evening away? Of course, you have. You toss out anecdotes all night long, volleying back and forth stories, until you realize it is getting way too late and you know tomorrow's workday is going to end up being a very, very sleepy one. All is good, so far. But, do you have neighbors who are diehard fans of a specific sports team? Yikes!

One Halloween evening, me (in male-mode) and Jen were invited to said neighbors' house to greet the trick-or-treating kids at the driveway (so they wouldn't have to ring the bell). I don't know if I had mentioned it to you, dear reader, but I am a casual sports fan, at best! Sure, I watch the Super Bowl like anyone else and get caught up in the fever of a local pro team making it to their respective championships, but that's about the extent of my fanaticism.

I was wearing a University of Michigan windbreaker and the neighbor joked we, „... couldn't be friends since I have such poor taste in college teams." I, unfortunately, made the mistake of defending one of my home state's collegiate programs by saying, „... they do have a good program." That set off a myriad of objecting shakes of the head and a tirade of „... no, no, no!" Of course, I was using logic to simply state the money U of M has does produce capable athletes.

„Can't we have a civil discourse about sports?" I asked.

„No," he said. „There's right and there's wrong."

I guess I was wrong about that civil discourse. I didn't really care about U of M's college sports programs. I didn't have any recent knowledge of any of the Wolverine team standings to bolster and support my case. Aside from that, though, I didn't appreciate the condescension in the couple's remarks, tone, and body language. Everything had gotten awkward very quickly because of their absolute defense of a mostly subjective topic.

NUMBER-CRUNCHING... STAT!

The same could be said for how society views individuals in the transgender community. To many, we aren't considered normal. We certainly do not share the established opinion of social acceptability. Social standards, religious doctrine, and generational beliefs have pushed us to the edges as outliers. Today, many see the people in the LGBTQ+ community as threats trying to burrow their way into the mainstream.

According to a 2017 Gallup poll[46], 4.5% of adult Americans identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community. 5.1% of the women identifying as LGBTQ+, compared with 3.9% of men. A different survey in 2016, from the Williams Institute, estimated 0.6% of U.S. adults identified as transgender. Aside from the District of Columbia which comes in with a 2.77% for transgender adults, all other states of the union in America have less than 1% reported. I can only assume these statistics will continue to increase as more young Americans realize that they want to be more open with their own concept of gender and sexuality. It is the 21st Century! Of course, the odds that many closeted crossdressers even acknowledged themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ is still uncertain.

PILLARS OF SOCIETY

So, why are our efforts to become another standard in the pillars of the societal structure being met with such resistance? Are we still considered a growing blight on the health of the nation? Are we a boil needing to be lanced and excised from the tough skin of a conservative, God-fearing American populace? The current political climate (in 2019) has certainly affected the progress of acceptance of transgender people. With bake shops unwilling to bake cakes for same-sex couples, county clerks refusing to process same-sex marriage licenses due to their religious views, LGBTQ language being eradicated from government documents and banned from use by the Center for Disease Control, the social climate has become stormy once again. Only time will tell whether crossdressers collectively emerge from their closets or whether they will stay where they deem it safest.

TIDE PODS

Americans are always trying to emulate and replicate things they see on social media. From the inherent fundraising benefits of doing the Ice Bucket challenge to the extreme ignorance of swallowing Tide Pods on an anonymous dare, we seem to be a society priding itself on following the flavor of the day. As the winds shift, the attitudes and conduct of the members of society shifts with it.

Now, gays and lesbians are mostly accepted in polite society. Same-sex marriage is now established as nationwide law in all fifty states and territories of the United States (as of June 2017[47]). Transsexual men and women have come into the forefront of the media with the celebrity power of Laverne Cox, Caitlen Jenner, Chaz Bono and others. As transpeople become more visible and create headlines in print and social media, the idea of transsexualism and transgenderism will become more understood and, if not to the point of actual acceptance, tolerated. How could anyone love an American Olympic decathlon gold-medal winner for years, and then despise him based on his decision to finally become a her?

SATURATION POINT

[46] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_demographics_of_the_United_States
[47] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obergefell_v._Hodges

Are cis-people afraid they will be forced to accept an ever-growing contingent of LGBTQ+ people and alternative beliefs?

„Come on. We finally let the gays and lesbians get married to each other, even though it goes against our morals."

„The freakiness of wanting to be the opposite sex—as long as it ain't bothering normal folk like me — ain't my business. As long as it don't affect me."

„To each his own and they can do what they want, but isn't enough, enough? Why do normal folk need to keep adjusting their tolerance of gender and sexual preference every time some freak in the LGBTQ+ community creates a new word to describe themselves?"

The previous few sentences were written to echo how we feel the general public perceives us. Because we seem to be the last lingering transgender group looked at as a taboo, it could be speculated society has reached a saturation point concerning its level of acceptance for people in the LGBTQ+ community.

Gays... lesbians... transgender... oh my!

Is it a societal worry that the moral values people have grown up with are on the precipice of being cast aside in favor of these new alternative ideas? Just a few years ago (and, even now, in many places), the idea of same-sex couples getting wed in a civil union, or of a man undergoing surgery to become a woman, would have been thought of with a shake of the head, a roll of the eyes, and a dismissive laugh. With so many public Pride parades and alternative lifestyles being pushed on the viewing public through mainstream media and entertainment (*Shameless, Orange is the New Black, Supergirl, True Blood, The L Word, Queer as Folk*, etc.), many cis-folk may see these queer lifestyles as being jammed down their throats in an attempt to choke out established and accepted morals. When does the minority voice become mainstream thinking?

THE CRUSADES

A thousand years ago, Pope Urban II called for a crusade against the Muslims to regain control of Jerusalem and the Holy Places of Palestine, since they were deemed very significant to the Christian religion. Over a period of two hundred years (the years 1095 to 1291), it is believed over one million people were killed. Hundreds of notable leaders had converted to Christianity from their own pagan beliefs over a millennium of time, leading to a current era where Christianity comprises 31.5% of the world's populace (2.1 billion people)[48].

Christians fought for acceptance, led knights into battle, and sent missionaries into uncharted jungles and cultures[49]. In modern America, the idea of Christianity has come under fire as being more about politics than about preaching the good word of the Gospels. It has been portrayed as being more about evangelizing their religious pride than about fostering

[48] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups

[49] https://nicholasmartindavis.com/all/things-people-really-hate-aboutchristians-today#Grdko3hgp8XHwvm2.97

relationships. It seemed more about admonishing others they consider Godless and of immoral character while perpetrating and defending their own high-profile sins. Are LGBTQ+ people trying to lead a crusade to get their own holy places back? While we look to certain events and locales as important to LGBTQ+ causes, I do not recall hearing about drag queens marching into Manhattan to take back Stonewall as our mecca. Laws governing all human beings are more important than those created to endorse and perpetuate outdated religious doctrine.

REVERSED JUDGEMENT

Are we judging others who do not share our beliefs? Probably. I, for one, tend to judge very harshly those people who judge me very harshly. Whether fielding venom from a family member, a political pundit, a religious zealot, or a narrowminded member of the LGBTQ+ community itself, my heart is saddened and darkened by their lack of compassion and education about who I am (or who we are as a group).

Are we immoral? To some we are. To those people or organizations, we are law breakers of the highest order — content to expose others to our corrupt and amoral ways. That is not to say we are breaking any constitutional laws, only breaking those guidelines the moral majority deem as righteous. Church and State are supposed to be separate, but God perpetuates itself throughout most things in the American culture.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Cultural Relativism[50] is the concept that a person's personal beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on his or her own culture. The belief is that a spectator into a person's life cannot judge him or her based on their own cultural backgrounds. Simply put, to impose your belief system onto others (who do not share your personal worldviews or values) is wrong thinking.

For Your Consideration~

Let's take a look at an example of cultural relativism. Imagine yourself in a mostly empty movie theater. Other theater-goers are spotted throughout the auditorium, their popcorn and soda in hand, waiting for the movie previews to begin. In America, we typically find seats away from the other patrons as a show of respect for their personal space. Rarely would any of us decide to sit next to someone in a half-occupied theater. In some other cultures, it would be considered rude to NOT sit next to one of the few other patrons, regardless of the plentitude of empty seats.

We can't understand why they would want to share such personal space in such a public setting. They cannot understand why we seem to need empty seats between us and other patrons — as a default — until such time the auditorium is nearing capacity and requires those buffer seats to be filled.

[50] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_relativism

This is a double-edged sword, isn't it? The vast mature American majority is clinging fiercely to their moral belief system as it applies to gender and sexuality because that is how they were raised. To deny them their cultural understanding about these things is falling prey to a lack of understanding of cultural relativism. While specific instances of cultural relativism are in sharper focus when looking at the practices and beliefs of world cultures — let's say a tribe in the Amazon rain forest — the same focus should also be applied when looking inward and closer to home.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community are also guilty — at times — of making demands under the guise of acceptance of others who live outside the community. While it is utterly critical to fight for equality where flagrant injustices are concerned, it can be off-putting when we flaunt our alternative gender and sexuality ideals to neighbors and a community steeped in an established doctrine of conduct — public and private.

LOVE YOURSELF FIRST

So, where does that leave us, Savannah? How can I be true to my own beliefs, while catering to the beliefs of everyone else?

Like I said, it's a double-edged sword... of massive proportions! When it comes to the last mysterious gender alternatives, it is most important to, first, be true to yourself and your own beliefs. You are a crossdresser (or a variation of the label). You enjoy dressing in feminine clothing to whatever degree makes you happy. That is who you are in spirit and in life. Find that definition for yourself, as well as your balance with your loved ones (if they are included in that part of your life and lifestyle). Only when you have self-compassion[51] — some psychology circles have dubbed it — do you accept your strengths and flaws alike. People who practice this skill tend to think more positively and have more empathy for others.

Having compassion for oneself is not a narcissistic trait. It is a critical component to channeling an internal connection of sympathy and empathy for those around your sphere of exposure and influence. When you have achieved a level of mastery in self-compassion, you will begin to understand and find relatability for both those who support you and your way of life and those who may be fundamentally opposed to how you conduct yourself.

That last group may feel disgust for your beliefs. They may find your actions unacceptable because they have no point of comparable reference. It is your responsibility to understand why their beliefs and experiences have shaped their opinion of you. That will make you empathetic. Let them see you as a human being first. Let them see that crossdressing doesn't affect your status as a productive member of society. It takes continued reinforced and positive actions to persuade others that you are just trying to live your own best life („Show, not tell").

Sometimes a positive attitude will rub off on others. If all else fails, you just have to be content to live your life in a way both true to you and respectful of others. I'm not saying you need to subjugate yourself to everyone's personal whims and rules if they are offensive to

[51] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/me-you-us/201604/do-you-havelove-yourself-someone-else-can

you. If that is the case, extradite yourself from the situation immediately. For me, I am respectful and open to almost any belief system, personal practices, and lifestyle. As long as people are respectful of me, I will reciprocate the same.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

Every person, unless completely self-absorbed and narcissistic, has, at one time or another, felt they were not normal. Every teenage boy or girl has had doubts of not fitting into one of the cliques at school — feeling they were outsiders. We look out on the world and see set measurable standards. We assume it to be normal — defining what is normal on behavioral, cultural, political, social, and religious levels.

Forty years ago, a boy carrying around Atari 2600 game cartridges or a copy of Marvel Comics Iron Man #100 might have been bullied by the ‚cooler' kids. These days, electronic and online gaming is a $20-billion-dollar industry in the United States[52] and the Iron Man movies have grossed over a billion dollars at the worldwide box office[53]. Comic books and gaming have become integral to today's pop culture, with no signs of slowing down. To paraphrase another famous quote, „The geeks will inherent the earth."

It may have taken decades for the fantasy of the ink and color paneled-page to come to life in the pop-culture collective imagination, but comics have always been a perfect medium for telling stories of outsiders and underdogs who stand up to evil. They use their great power to overcome their foes, letting us know we can be alright in our own skins.

WARHOL

Media is both a reflection and a harbinger of current culture and society. Whether used for shock value or in earnest, the portrayal of gays, lesbians, transgender men and women, and crossdressers has exposed our content-hungry culture to the idea of what it means to have an alternative gender or sexual identity. For me, it serves as a social barometer. What stories are being told?

Storytelling is important, both to teach us where we have come from and where we are collectively heading to as a society.

Some may say the mass media maps out the culture it wants to present. Spin doctoring and agenda-setting are both going on, hence the reason why the term „fake news" has come into vogue in news reporting channels. But, when it comes to fictional storytelling, the relevance of current events and emerging slices of social significance can only survive based on the reception of its audience. As with anything in media, if the content is not profitable or acclaimed, it will quickly fall into obscurity or be under the threat of cancellation. Many times, media is the source for polarizing positions and starting conversations. In late 2018, Netflix was caught up by opposing views of its decision to include „Super Drag" into their lineup — a Brazilian cartoon with crossdressing superheroes[54]. But, in my opinion, if parents do not want

[52] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_game_industry
[53] https://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/chart/?id=ironmanfranchise.htm
[54] https://decider.com/2018/10/25/everything-you-need-know-about-superdrags/

their children exposed to the show they should add parental controls on their Netflix account or supervise their children's viewing habits.

For Your Consideration~

As society becomes more exposed to alternative lifestyles in the media, entertainment or in person, it will become more desensitized to the shock of alternative lifestyle choices. Desensitization is not a bad word. It is simply the lowering of positive or negative sensitivity to stimulus after repeated exposure to it[55]. For the LGTBQ+ community, de-sensitivity is important to prepare someone, outside the community, to take the next important step — education and, hopefully, tolerance and acceptance.

[55] https://www.quora.com/If-something-becomes-very-common-does-itbecome-normal

2.25. I Can't Get No Satisfaction

The man who is dissatisfied with himself, what can he do?

~ Henry David Thoreau

Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else.

~ Charles Sander Pierce

FORCED DYSPHORIA

Described as a state of generalized unhappiness, restlessness, dissatisfaction, or frustration, and it can be a symptom of several mental health conditions.[56], dysphoria can be sinister and debilitating in how it chips away at a person's self-esteem and self-image. A good example of dysphoria is for people suffering from long-term or chronic illness or pain. The constant or intermittent pain or malaise can eventually wear down a person's endurance and positivity, causing dysphoric moods.

On the physical side, for decades, cis-women have been forced to compete with body image standards portrayed on the covers of glossy magazines. Aren't these „perfect" examples of feminine beauty simply geared to both elevate women and tear them down at the same time? That's not including phone app filters, Photoshop and airbrushing techniques used to perfect a look near impossible to achieve just by normal genetics alone.

Gender dysphoria focuses on a person's dissatisfaction of their biological bodies and their frustration that their gender identity does not match that biology, either partially or completely. With transgender individuals, the feeling of dysphoria can be extreme. It is one thing to aspire to a gender ideal matching your biology, but the dysphoria a trans-person endures encompasses the feelings of failure to achieve a biological ideal of the opposite their own. Men may feel they should have been born a woman, detesting the fact they are growing facial hair or have male genitalia. They can become anxious and restless as they are reminded on a daily basis that what they see in the mirror is not what they know themselves to be.

To feel like a woman on a psychological level, but be trapped in the skin of something overtly considered masculine, is very disconcerting. Beyond that, a man trying to emulate the opposite gender — laced with what cis-women deal with now as the lofty standard of beauty — adds layers of difficulty that the thickest makeup and the tightest corsetry may not easily overcome.

PRACTICAL STEPS

Gender dysphoria couples the issues of living up to gender-specific physical standard with a body not typically built to achieve it. Most advocates would stress that anyone with these feelings should seek professional therapy in order to better manage and understand their emotions. Ignoring treatment could result in one of a number of mental health issues —

[56] https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/dysphoria

including mood disorders, anxiety, and depression. These issues can lead to substance and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide attempts.

In addition to therapy, a gender dysphoric individual may take steps to align their physical appearance closer to how they feel psychologically. The changes range from simple crossdressing to more permanent medical alterations. They alter their appearance with clothing and makeup. The trans-individual may also take on an alternative persona to match how their identity. To many, this level of presentation may be enough for representing their dual identity. For others, crossdressing is just the first step on a longer journey. The crossdressing appeases the gender dysphoria for a time. After becoming more comfortable in the role and routine of it, they may realize their crossdressing presentation is still not enough — leaving them waiting more.

The gender dysphoria returns. These crossdressers don't feel feminine enough. Their male biology keeps them from presenting themselves in the feminine manner in which their mind's eye wants them to. They want softer skin. They wish they had less body hair. Why couldn't they have a more petite nose and a slighter body frame? Why did they have to have such bulky muscles? Why did they have to have that other muscle between their legs? Gender dysphoria is insidious. It whispers in their ear in varying degrees and different levels of loudness.

The dysphoria can be all-encompassing. No rationalization or validation will stem the depressing suck of spirit from positive to negative. We are our own worst enemies as it pertains to how we see ourselves. Only the most narcissistic of us will see themselves as gods of masculine or goddesses of feminine beauty. For the rest of us, that nose still looks bulbous in spite of all of the contouring powder. No amount of tape will give us the cleavage we wish would fill up the cups of our bras. No matter how much we tuck our manhood away between our legs behind our gaffs or panties, the fact it exists is a constant reminder we were born in the wrong body.

This crossdresser is no longer strictly a crossdresser. The art of crossdressing allowed them to grow more comfortable with their femininity. It allowed them to find a new center of balance, which opened their eyes to the road unfolding before them. Crossdressing wasn't the end, but just a waystation to someplace else. As I stated before, I hope therapy plays a part in treating any prolonged dysphoric affliction. Based on the answers you find for yourself and what you need in order to feel normal, many other avenues can be explored aside from simply wearing the clothes of the opposite gender.

PERMANENT PRESS

Although the following content may seem obvious, I wanted to touch on other avenues many gender-dysphoric individuals have taken to achieve balance of identity. Depending on the age of the person and the acceptance of others in their life, more solutions exist than only the act of crossdressing.

The first are puberty blockers. T-blockers (testosterone blockers) will prevent the body from producing its own biological hormones throughout adolescence. The body will remain in

a state of pre-puberty as long as hormone blockers are in use. Of course, that alone may not achieve the biological changes the individual is looking for. The opposite hormone may need to be introduced.

Teenagers and adults (coupled with blockers) may take testosterone or estrogen to develop the biological traits of the gender they want to identify with. Muscle mass will change. With added estrogen, skin and body hair will become softer. The male genitals may shrink in size. Breast tissue typically increases in size. With testosterone, body and facial hair will increase and the hair follicles on the scalp may decrease (damn you, male-pattern baldness!). But, even after all the biological changes hormones can have on the body, more can be medically done.

The option of going under the knife is available. From tracheal and other bone shaving procedures for facial reconstruction surgery (FRS) to complete sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), there are very advanced medical procedures available for a man to become the woman they had always hoped to be. Some will supplement their cleavage with augmentation if the size of their hormone-induced breasts was insufficient. Fat can be moved from one place on the body to another to supplement the curviness of the hips, breasts, and buttocks. And, of course, a transitioning male-to-female can have their male genitalia inverted to form a functioning vagina.

There is a distinct difference between a crossdressing man and a transitioning man-to-woman. For the crossdresser, the art and presentation of dressing as a woman (with padding, tucking, and makeup) is enough to allow their inherent feminine spirits to spread their wings and soar. For the transitioning man, crossdressing will never be enough to overcome the gender dysphoria they are continually plagued with. The start of each journey may have many similarities, but the obstacles on and distances of the journeys will be different for everyone who sets foot on the gender-bending gravel to begin with.

A BAD CASE OF LOVING YOU

That is not to say crossdressers do not have dysphoria. We crossdressers can absolutely face gender-dysphoria to varying degrees. I had thought for a long time I had never experienced dysphoria. Sure, I had struggled with perfecting my feminine presentation and always thought I was failing in that regards (because I am, after all, a man). I needed hip padding to compensate for the broadness of my shoulders. I needed additional contouring on my face to help it look a bit more feminine and not just painted up and caked on. My body hair always disgusts me, both because I think back hair is gross but also because of the amount of shaving that needs to be done to be presentable. I understand I am constantly trying to put 180 lbs. of man into 150 lbs. of woman, but I was never unhappy with my biology.

That was, until I met another crossdresser with whom I had been chatting with on social media. We finally met face-to-face when she planned to get ready at my Long Island apartment for a private crossdressing event. She had come over to my apartment to prepare for a private party hosted by Femme Fever. She looked amazing, having a slight frame and very

feminine features. Her makeup wasn't something covering up her masculinity, but accentuated her inherent femininity.

After she finished getting ready, I even took her to Starbucks to prove being out in public — in broad daylight, gasp! — wasn't so scary, either. It was going to be one of her first times out and I was happy to be her partner in crime for the evening. We had a great time and she was very, very comfortable hanging out among her contemporaries.

A few days later, I became very depressed. I hated the way I looked as Savannah. Nothing could shake me out of the downward spiral I suddenly found myself in. My shoulders were too wide... my face would never be feminine enough to allow me to pass in public... I was too fat... all my dresses looked terrible on me. In the throes of all this newfound unhappiness and physical self-sabotage, I realized I was experiencing my first real bout of gender dysphoria!

What I was feeling wasn't the logical and intellectual understanding of the limit of my feminine presentation. The feeling was a harsh and hard truth I would never pass as a woman... period. Nothing I could do would help to overcome it. I would never be as flawless as how I saw my friend. It wasn't total despair, but it was still a serious emotional blow to my feminine confidence. I had to find ways of working through these feelings.

I talked through my worries with Jen. I spilled them out in essay form for my website. I reached out to my network on social media. All of these outlets helped to put the gender dysphoria into perspective. Some of the help was in an intellectual format; some was simple reassurance and validation. It all helped to dispel the notion of the ugly crossdressing monster I had come to expect staring back at me from the mirror.

My mistake was in thinking I had been above such visceral dysphoric *nonsense*, not realizing my own everyday worries about the success of my feminine presentation was always a low-grade version of it. The fact that I so easily spiraled into a depressive funk because of a moment of feminine comparison is testament no one is above blinding self-doubt and self-shaming.

We can only be our best selves with the skills and resources we have at our disposal. We will always be our own worst critics, but we are, also, all unique and beautiful in our own way. We have a personality, charm, and radiance that enhances us beyond what is captured through the lens of our smartphones.

WINGS OF A DOVE

As a parting commentary about how others see you versus how you see yourself, I recommend you watch the „Real Beauty" short documentary series. They promote the idea that strangers asked to describe you after one meeting will see you more clearly then how you see yourself. I also recommend Visura Magazine's slideshow of Jodi Bieber's work showcasing women of various sizes, races, ages in their underwear and in their natural beauty. In her work, no filtering or Photoshop was used to enhance, hide or remove any imperfections.

If we saw the same image of us as others did, we would exude self-worth. As ironic and counter-intuitive as it may sound, the confidence you bring with you is just as important as proper foundation and the right dress for your body type. When someone asks, „Is she

pretty?“ and the answer is, „Well, she has a great personality!“, it typically means the woman in question is, in actuality, considered plain or unattractive. I disagree with this accepted line of thinking. The level of personality and spirit of an individual are the things that can make the plainest woman beautiful and the most gorgeous woman ugly. Your mom always told you it was what was on the inside that counts. In the end, those words of wisdom will always be proven right.

2.26. Public Relations

If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships - the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace.

~ Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Cherish your human connections; your relationship with friends and family.

~ Joseph Brodsky

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Dictionary.com describes earnestness as „full seriousness, as of intention or purpose“[57]. While some men may see crossdressing as simply a sexual fetish to enjoy with their partners (or, alone), others are secretly searching for answers to a myriad of questions plaguing them about their gender. As we have discussed in this book, understanding where you are on your journey for identity and the most authentic life is very important.

Can you truly be in a healthy and honest relationship if you have not examined why you do what you do? I do not expect you to have the answer to this most basic and sought-after question. It is almost impossible, even in the 21st century, to understand the true psychological or physiological motivations to dress up as the opposite gender. Theories abound about the whys of crossdressing.

Is it mental illness or simple perverse fetishism? Are crossdressers a result of reincarnation echoes spent as the opposite gender? Is there a different chemical makeup in the brain that causes us to be an amalgam of masculine and feminine thoughts? All I know for certainty is we need an outlet for our feminine sides. Instinctual needs aside, we must examine what motivates us to do the things we do, and what happiness we find as a result.

(WO)MAN IN THE MIRROR

Savannah, how am I supposed to do that if I can't answer the first question?

While some claim male-to-female crossdressing is just sexual fetish, we who dress in feminine attire have much more in play than just sexual cravings and carnal release. There are deep emotional ties to our dressing, whether resulting in a sense of calm and contentment, shame, fear, sensuality, regret. How well do you understand how dressing affects you... and why?

Looking back at the Combination of Life chapter, have you taken the first step in reflecting on who are you at your core? Are you a man who has an occasional need to present as a woman? Do you have a pressing need to experience life as a woman on a more frequent basis? Have you spent a lifetime repressing your nature (out of respect for others, out of fear of reprisals or discovery, etc.), only to discover a growing feminine presence that cannot be denied?

How do I take that first step?

---

[57] https://www.dictionary.com/browse/earnest

It may sound daunting, but it is simpler than you think. The key is to not project the regrets from the past to the questions of today. The past is done, the future is yet to come. Try to understand what it is you are facing in this moment. Something of a spiritual awakening is required to get to the absolute truth regarding you. Yes, it sounds very much like the „take the pebble from my hand“ type of mysticism from television series like *Kung Fu*, but it is critical to be critical when it comes to your journey.

IN SEARCH OF

After several months of residing in the great Upstate of South Carolina, I finally met a second out-and-about crossdresser named Carol. It was a very exciting moment to realize I would get a chance to chat with her. And, as is typical when you meet someone with a similar story, the conversation inevitably gravitated to crossdressing anecdotes. I have dubbed these stories as our drag-ologues.

There is an inherent kinship between crossdressers — as I am sure exists between people of all walks of life with notable shared experience. Since some crossdressers do not have easy access to others like themselves in a real-life setting, it can be a rare opportunity to meet others face-to-face. Our inherent empathy allows us to open up to each other in a very surprising way.

Carol described her journey thus far, focusing on the questions plaguing her. She did not get into the specifics of her „coming up“ or „coming out“, wondering aloud more about where her crossdressing journey would lead her next. The questions were open-ended and filled with „what-if's“. How would her decisions affect her family? How would her sexual preferences change if she decided to transition? What encounters did she want to experience in order to feel validated as her feminine self? What if she decided to undergo sexual reassignment surgery? Would that mean she would start liking men? Should she tell her adult children about her crossdressing?

Her questions were valid, reflecting someone with many slowly forming ideas. I knew, though, we didn't have the kind of time we needed to discuss it all in one sitting.

BOB ROSS

We are all on parallel paths, enjoying the same scenery at different angles. We see the same mountain peaks with clouds above them and the sun's rays creating shadows at different lengths and depths. We feel differently about those craggy peaks and valleys, based on our experiences. Some may have a handy map to guide them, while others hope putting one foot in front of another will suffice. For each of us, the journey is different... the destination is different... the experience is different, but we each hope for the same outcome.

What are we hoping for?

We are searching for balance — in both a biological and a psychological sense. Who are we? Why are we here? We have all asked the same esoteric queries of life others have been trying to answer for millennia. One small problem persists in finding the concrete answers you seek. All things rarely exist in a static permanence. If you find answers to one question, it

should not mean you never revisit the same query again, or that you should not be ready for new questions bubbling up as a result.

The decisions you make today are not set in stone for the future. Views can change. As you understand yourself better, you expand the possibilities for who you can be. You may always be content to be a man who likes to dress as a woman from time to time. You may find you always need to wear something feminine under your male-mode clothes to keep your femininity grounded amid the rest of your masculinity. Or, you may find you require a more physically permanent change to feel balanced. All are choices requiring reflection. The pond may ripple with the pebbles of uncertainty, your doubt creating rings on the water's surface. But, when the pond becomes quiet, what you see will be much clearer.

SERENITY NOW

People talk about being „woke". Apparently, it's a thing. It is defined as being socially aware of systemic injustices and prejudices (mostly related to civil and human rights). I hope I can get you to awaken yourself from your own inner prejudices and self-imposed limitations. What follows are simple steps (although I'm not saying self-assessment is simple) to help keep you centered, balanced, and aware of your gender duality.

I liken self-assessment and self-discovery to a spiritual awakening. Because of years of possible repression and persecution suffered, you may be reluctant to look too hard into the truth within you. Why dig into something that is just going to put you into someone else's crosshairs, right? These exercises are for you and you alone. Nobody needs to be privy to what is in your private heart — until you decide to share what shines there.

I can only relay a few steps for achieving a better sense of self[58]. I'm not saying this process is the end-all-be-all to your personal path of enlightenment, but these methods will help you find your gooey crossdressing center. Starts with simplifying your mental and physical state, and end with the ability to let go of unimportant things.

One last note before we begin... this is not a „one and done" process. As mentioned earlier, our individual path is a never-ending journey and our gender and sexual identity do not exist in a static state. Albert Einstein was once quoted as saying, „once you stop learning you start dying." While I try to keep the process simple, keep in mind that anything worth doing is not necessarily easy.

SIMPLIFICATION

Mark the extraneous things in your house, head and heart. Get rid of or donate the physical things serving to get in your way. I am not telling anyone to live a Spartan lifestyle. I know too many crossdressers requiring several closets for their feminine personas to suggest such an idea. I am, however, advising you that an orderly life is the first step to realizing a fulfilled life. Some people tend to buy (...and buy and buy...) stuff simply to feel the rush of owning something new. Having a closet full of new clothes and shoes doesn't necessarily

[58] https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-29936/6-ways-to-invite-a-spiritualawakening-to-transform-your-life.html

equate to a prolonged joy of owning — or even using — those things. Many times, the urge to increase our material possessions end up being a short-lived elation.

For cleaning up a static and cluttered mind, try to understand those things plaguing you and earmark them for „donation". Take time to sit in silence and solitude. Allow time to wander over the meadows and the rocky crags making up the landscape of your mindscape. With practice and decided discipline, a few minutes of meditation can help to relax you, provide solace over lingering fears, and open up a channel to your inherent intuition. Remember, your mind is a powerful muscle. All you need to do is flex it once in a while.

EXAMINATION

You can only truly understand yourself with honest and ruthless soul-searching. Those in Alcoholics Anonymous know something similar as Step 4 of their Twelve-Step program where they have „...made a searching and fearless moral inventory..." for themselves[59]. External opinions and judgements can influence your own values in a positive or negative way. The advantage of understanding your own mind is realizing you are the one in charge. If you are honest with what truths you are trying to uncover — at this very moment — you allow yourself to be more open to personal growth.

It can be very scary for a crossdressing man to look inward. All of those questions asked about our sexuality and physical gender identity will come into play again. Do we want more from our feminine identity than just part-time or periodic dressing? Do we, in fact, like men in a different way than we think we do?

Do not be afraid of the answers you may find when you turn over the hidden recesses of your brain. There is no shame in realizing you are not be as cookie-cutter and black-and-white as you were socially conditioned and culturally indoctrinated to believe. I understand your upbringing may influence how you feel about the questions you find the answers to. I am not obtuse enough to believe any of us operate in a social vacuum. But, I am a firm believer we must examine what we want for a full life in order to discover a fulfilled life. Figuring out those answers is the first step in understanding the direction you should travel in life.

EXPANSION

Revelations do not occur in a vacuum. Our ability to problem solve is a direct corollary to the amount of intellectual knowledge we have at our disposal. In reality, it is a difficult journey to unleash a spiritual awakening without, also, dedicating time to educate yourself. You can't know what you don't know.

So, what do I do?

Learn more about what it means to be a crossdresser on the transgender spectrum. Find out what it means to be a gender-bender or a drag queen. What does it mean to be gender-fluid? Read about the topics. Find outlets where you can engage in meaningful conversation. Educate yourself about other gender identities to see if any of them ring true to you. Press against your established assumptions.

---

[59] https://jasonwahler.com/breaking-down-step-four-of-aa-alcoholicsanonymous/

Don't look only for the obvious answers, for they will typically support what you already think you know. That is not expansive thinking. You need to seek out answers in a broader way. Only when you allow in new ideas, beliefs, and perspectives can you open yourself up to new possibilities.

MEDITATION

Not to sound hokey or new-age-y, but simply quieting your mind for short periods of time has great benefits. With all of the smartphones, streaming services, and access to endless rabbit holes of new information, it is very important to pull back from all of the stimuli and center yourself with just the thoughts rattling around inside your own head.

Sit quietly at home in your overstuffed easy chair listening to your favorite instrumental music. Take a hike through forested park trails park on your lunch break. Whatever your method of unwinding, let your mind enjoy a moment of solitude. Leave behind the bombardment of pop-up ads, social media click-bait and electronic misinformation. Serenely sorting through your thoughts and gathered information is a practiced art. Letting the puzzle pieces slowly and organically fall into place (metaphorically) requires a clear table and a roll-up felt mat until you complete your gender picture.

RECEPTION

This will be a quick section. I promise.

In order to better process the incoming information and understand the sometimes-scary realizations bubbling up inside, you need to be combat ready. You are wrestling with big, possibly life-changing ideas about who you are. The last things you need are sore muscles, a tired mind, and a depleted spirit. Your overall health is imperative for your general sanity and for your ability to connect the dots for your true path.

ACCEPTANCE

An idea forms. Something read or heard in conversation will have resonance. The seed of an idea germinates and sprouts. You recognize a new side of you emerging into the light.

What now?

Now? It is the time to test whether this fragment of thought feels true for you. Just because you have an attraction to this idea does not mean it will fit you like a cozy well-worn sweater. What you can do, however, is throw away notions tying you to an outdated and indoctrinated line of thinking in order to explore who you are.

REPETITION

Your crossdressing identity is not „all or nothing". First, you need to understand who you are and what fulfills you as an individual. Then, you need to decide how you want to proceed on all other matters of family, friends, careers, etc. Your confidence in your identity will morph as you become more enlightened about the true you.

Some may say we open ourselves up to new gender and sexual experiences because we are simple fetishists who will pursue anything that moves. Some may say we are just repressed homosexuals using our crossdressing as a way to make our attraction to men feel more

acceptable. Some may say we are not crossdressers at all, simply men who have felt dysphoric in our bodies and will eventually realize we need to take the leap into womanhood with chemical and surgical permanence. They can say whatever they want... for me, I've put in the work to best know myself.

The so-called repression of our true selves could have been attributed to nothing more than the ignorance to what was possible out in the world. It may stem from being raised to believe these possibilities were only reserved for society's perverse undesirables. Maybe we didn't have an outlet, before now, to explore and determine if an alternative gender or sexuality was something that fit. I do not believe one suddenly turns homosexual or wants to transition to the opposite gender. I believe, as we set ourselves on the road to self-discovery, we find our true heart and the true spirit in stasis inside us all along. All we needed was the right information to allow us to emerge from our cocoons.

UNDERSTANDING THE URGE

So... we did all of this soul-searching. We discovered more about who we are as individuals. We realized we have a new „normal" and it brings with it a variety of new obstacles and challenges. Now life is more complicated than ever! Thanks a lot, Savannah!

In my book, *Living with Crossdressing: Defining a New Normal*, I exposed the reader to several stories of couples dealing with the aftermath of a crossdressing reveal in their relationship. I wrote of the balance that must be struck in order for the crossdressing man to be true to both himself and his partner. What I had neglected, in some ways, was to speak directly to my beautiful crossdressers about your own personal balance. It is a singular success to attain balance within your relationship and the community. It is, wholly, another goal to reach the point where your personal „weight" on the Scales of Life teeter-totter to a delicate equilibrium. So many crossdressers are still closeted, filled with fear, worry, and regret.

Remember when the gay and lesbian communities predominantly used the term „closeted" in their own lives? We crossdressers were so deep in our own closets, we were backing into the prickly underbrush of the snowy lands in the cursed winter of Narnia. Now, as the gay and lesbian communities are finding their footing out in a more equalized society, crossdressers are slowly realizing the front of the closet is more brightly lit and inviting.

Accepting who we are, in the face of a society still considering us something freakish, is a daunting task. How do we accept ourselves if people around us still ostracize our kind? I, for one, have found comfort in knowing the most important people in my life to whom I have revealed Savannah to have been very supportive of *her*. Part of the reason why comes from the confidence I have in myself, as well as my confidence in their ability and capacity to accept the true me.

Some of the important people in my life — parents, bosses at my job, childhood friends — will probably never learn about Savannah. I still have a measure of fear that their opinion of me will change. It was written somewhere that ‚love is unconditional', but I still hedge when I consider telling my parents. am not confident enough to test the theory. I guess that means even my confidence is also not unconditional. As I have said before, I cannot speak to your

personal situation as it comes to revealing yourself to others. All I can do is hope you possess the self-confidence you need to be true to yourself.

BARE IT ALL

Whether inside our nuclear relationship or our commitments within our larger social circles, we strive for acceptance. While online apps and websites are great for connecting with others like ourselves, they are not a substitute for physical interactions with them. Online group or dating sites still have that abstract veil of realism that can be exploited to ill effect.

Being engaged in public outings, on the other hand, serves a couple of purposes. They bring us together with people having shared or similar experiences and wisdom. The more experienced crossdressers can share their stories with the novices of the group. Seeing another person „just like you“ — making all the right choices and being so at ease in public — is empowering. It gives us something to aspire to and helps us overcome some of our own fears. We all need role models and heroes, even if they don't wear capes on any day other than Halloween night.

Sharing our stories with others allows us to get outside perspective and feedback[60]. Hearing that others have faced similar adversity — and have come out the other side intact — will leave an echoing impression for future reference.

As a storyteller of your own life, you tend to shape it into a linear fashion — with interesting tangents thrown in along the way. Delineating the story in an intelligent way creates an opportunity to realize something new about yourself. It's similar to talking through a problem. When you add your voice to your intellect, you tend to encounter more breakthroughs. In storytelling, one tends to focus on the more important elements (unless you are a rambler, of course). The pace and plot of your story will begin to conform to the rules of narrative storytelling — a journey with a beginning, middle and end. The end is not the end, but this specific moment in time.

DON'T BEAR IT ALL

When you talk about your crossdressing journey, you figure out what is important to share[61]. Even anecdotes you don't find interesting can resonate with someone listening to the tale. Whether you are sharing your story as you sit at a coffee house table or standing on a stage in an auditorium full of crossdressers, most people will be able to empathize and pick up on parallels to their own lives. It's not uncommon for crossdressers to have a very similar story where...

„...I snuck into my mom's room to try on my first femme clothes.“

„...I was almost caught once... well, maybe more than once.“

„...I had these urges to wear panties. Then it got worse!“

---

[60] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-webviolence/201309/resilience-and-4-benefits-sharing-your-story

[61] https://www.blueprintsforrecovery.com/blog/2017/june/sharing-can-bebeneficial-in-aa-meetings/

Many of us have wrestled with physical attraction to our own gender, whether toward another crossdresser or a male admirer. Some of us have struggled with the balance of our gender identity, wondering how far from our birth biology we should stray. While the stories will have different characters and outcomes, each crossdresser brings a perspective based on their own experience and may be able to enhance or expand your thinking about your own situation. At the very least, you will realize you are not alone in your crossdressing life. Moreover, you will find you will develop strong bonds with a new family of friends.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER

A parallel could be made about the chapters of a book being similar to chapters in life. I write this book with, hopefully, an obvious beginning, middle, and end. As we have already discussed, the end is never really the end. Each moment we live, we create something new for ourselves. Each day can bring a new energy, a new enlightenment, and a new perspective allowing us to grow emotionally. This newfound attitude is critical—for yourself, your partners, your family and friends, and in society. We talk about balance in life and with your partners in my other book, but it all starts here! Your understanding of your gender identity is a wonderful foundation on which to build your self-esteem and confidence. That awareness will give you the tools to share yourself with others in a positive and productive way

That is not to say you won't still need to continue your search for answers, as each discovery should always lead to more questions. Crossdressing shouldn't ever be a static state of being. Dressing and going out to dinner every other Tuesday may bring you all the feminine joy you need, but making a point to assess the status of your personal journey is important.

HISTORY AND EXCLUSIVITY

We have been raised to believe we are either male or female. We have been indoctrinated with the stereotypical and socially acceptable masculine and feminine traits. Those traits have been tied to the obvious established gender roles (masculine = male; feminine = female). But, a varied and adjustable human gender spectrum exists, not just the tentpoles of the overtly masculine or feminine.

In many cultures, including Native American, the idea of a two-gender system was not the default. Intersex individuals were revered and treated as shamans[62]. Even now, in the present-day Indian subcontinent, Hijras are officially recognized as a third gender[63]. They are neither completely male or female. In Thailand, transgendered women are also considered a third — and accepted — gender[64].

Challenge your indoctrinated assumptions. Discover what history has to tell you about how gender has been perceived. Be aware of how other modern cultures look at masculine and feminine forms and spirits. Don't be shackled by the accepted social constructs for gender and sexuality because of what biological sex was inked on your birth certificate.

---

[62] https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/health/twospirit/

[63] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(Indian_subcontinent)

[64] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathoey

2.27. Is This Goodbye?

Could we see when and where we are to meet again, we would be more tender when we bid our friends goodbye.

~ Ouida

Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.

~ Mother Teresa

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW... AGAIN

Here we are again. The conclusion of another adventure together. I cannot say I am happy we are at the end. I don't care that an author once said, „The end is never the end." Wait. I said that earlier in this book! Well, we are here... at this specific ending. I may even return with more to write about. I will certainly be accessible and available for those who have questions or comments. So, I guess this cannot truly be considered the end.

As I had described earlier, life is constantly changing. Every moment we are alive allows for us to decide to take another positive step, create another positive interaction, and expose those around us to why we are so amazing. Embracing your amalgamation of femininity and masculinity, having an appreciation and affection beyond the established gender specifics, and showing the world your true and authentic self will be testament to the fact you — and, we collectively — will never disappear... and will thrive in a pursuit of a full and honest life.

Give the dials of the Combination of Life a spin. They may not address the questions you were hoping to have answered, but you may just come away from the reading experience with a better sense of who you are... at this moment. The world is ever-changing — as it always is, without asking permission — and we will continue to be influenced and changed along the way by the experiences we have and the company we keep.

Have positive experiences.

Keep yourself in good company.

Look inside yourself for your specific truth.

And, at the end of the day, share your truth in a humble, earnest and graceful way.

With warmest regards and love,
Savannah Hauk

2.28. Resources & Bibliographies

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to the efforts and authors who helped me to better my own understanding.

Deloto, Barbara, Thomas Newgen. *An Addicted Cross-Dresser, Married and a Happy Ending – A True Story;* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Boyd, Helen. *My Husband Betty: Love, Sex, and Life with a Crossdresser*. PM Publishers Inc, 2003.

Rudd, Peggy J. *My Husband Wears my Clothes*. Seal Press, 2003.

Erhardt, Virginia. *Head Over Heels: Wives Who Stay with Cross-Dressers and Transsexuals*. Routledge, 2006.

http://www.brainyquotes.com
http://www.livingwithcrossdressing.com
http://www.tgforum.com
http://www.tinybuddha.com
http://www.plannedparenthood.org
http://www.femmefever.com
http://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com

Fiala, Andrew. „Toleration“., http://www.iep.utm.edu/tolerati

Cath (Host), Faith (Host). (2019, January 10). *Does God Make Mistakes?* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from https://www.podbean.com/eu/pb-6tmgc-a41afe.

2.29. Transgendered Terms

These terms come from www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com. It is a wonderful resource for all things transgender. I strongly urge you to use it as a resource for relevant and up-to-date information.

agender – *adj.*: a person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless.

ally /„al-lie“/ – *noun*: a (typically straight and/or cisgender) person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ community. We consider people to be active allies who take action on in support and respect.

androgyny/ous /„an-jrah-jun-ee“; „an-jrah-jun-uss“/ – *adj.*: **1** a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity.

androsexual / androphilic – *adj.*: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some men, males, and/or masculinity.

aromantic – *adj.*: experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior.

asexual – adj.: experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior.

bigender – *adj.*: a person who fluctuates between traditionally „woman“ and „man“ gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender).

bicurious – *adj.*: a curiosity about having attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning).

biological sex – *noun*: a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male or intersex.

biphobia – *noun*: a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, invisibility, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have or express towards bisexual individuals.

bisexual – *adj.*: **1** a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. **2** a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of their gender and another gender.

butch – *noun & adj.*: a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally.

cisgender /„siss-jendur“/ – *adj.*: a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and assigned male at birth).

cissexism – *noun*: behavior that grants preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforces the idea that being cisgender is somehow better or more „right“ than being transgender, and/or makes other genders invisible.

cisnormativity – *noun*: the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to trans* identities or people.

closeted – *adj*.: an individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity.

clocking – *verb*.: term used to reflect that someone transgender has been recognized as trans, usually when that person is trying to blend in with cisgender people, and not intending to be seen as anything other than the gender they present.

cross-dresser – *noun*: someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

deadnaming – *verb*.: the practice of uttering or publishing the name that a trans person used prior to transition.

demiromantic – *adj.*: little or no capacity to experience romantic attraction until a strong sexual or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a sexual relationship.

demisexual – *adj*.: little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a romantic relationship.

doxxing – *verb.*: slang for „dropping documents“, a practice begun by hackers more than a decade ago. These hackers would collect and then reveal „personal and private information, including home addresses and national identity numbers.

drag king – *noun*: someone who performs masculinity theatrically.

drag queen – *noun*: someone who performs femininity theatrically.

dyke – *noun*: referring to a masculine presenting lesbian. While often used derogatorily, it can is adopted affirmatively by many lesbians (both more masculine and more feminine presenting lesbians not necessarily masculine ones) as a positive self-identity term.

fag(got) – *noun*: derogatory term referring to a gay person, or someone perceived as queer. Occasionally used as an self-identifying affirming term by some gay men, at times in the shortened form ‚fag‘.

feminine-of-center; masculine-of-center – *adj*.: a word that indicates a range of terms of gender identity and gender presentation for folks who present, understand themselves,

and/or relate to others in a more feminine/masculine way, but don't necessarily identify as women/men.

feminine-presenting; masculine-presenting – *adj.*: a way to describe someone who expresses gender in a more feminine/masculine way.

femme – *noun & adj.*: someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman.

fluid(ity) – *adj.*: generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight).

FtM / F2M; MtF / M2F – *abbreviation*: female-to-male transgender or transsexual person; male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

gay – *adj.*: individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender.

gender binary – *noun*: the idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two.

gender dysphoria – *noun*: the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex.

gender euphoria – *noun*: The opposite of gender dysphoria.
Of a cisgender person, it is a state of happiness about being male or female and having the associated gender roles and body parts.
Of a transgender person, it refers to feeling great about living as your desired gender.

gender expression – *noun*: the external display of one's gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally made sense of on scales of masculinity and femininity.

gender fluid– *adj.*: gender fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl.

gender identity – *noun*: the internal perception of an one's gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their options for gender to be.

gender non-conforming – *adj.*: **1** a gender expression descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender presentation (masculine woman or feminine man).

gender normative / gender straight – *adj.*: someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society's gender-based expectations.

genderqueer – *adj.*: a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).

gender variant – *adj.*: someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, gender-queer, cross-dresser, etc).

gynesexual / gynephilic /„guy-nuh-seks-shu-uhl“/ – *adj.*: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some woman, females, and/or femininity.

heteronormativity – *noun*: the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual (e.g. asking a woman if she has a boyfriend) and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

hermaphrodite – *noun*: an outdated medical term previously used to refer to someone who was born with some combination of typically-male and typically-female sex characteristics.

heteronormativity – *noun*: the assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

heterosexism – *noun*: behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more „right“ than queerness, and/or makes other sexualities invisible.

heterosexual – *adj.*: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Also known as straight.

homophobia – *noun*: an umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of LGBTQ community.

homosexual – *adj. & noun*: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender.

intersex – *adj.*: term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female.

lesbian – *noun & adj.*: women who have the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to some other women.

LGBTQ; GSM; DSG – *abbreviations*: shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality, there are many different initialisms people prefer. LGBTQ is Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and/or Questioning (sometimes people at a + at the end in an effort to be more inclusive); GSM is Gender and Sexual Minorities; DSG is Diverse Sexualities and Genders. Other options include the initialism GLBT or LGBT and the

acronym QUILTBAG (Queer [or Questioning] Undecided Intersex Lesbian Trans* Bisexual Asexual [or Allied] and Gay [or Genderqueer]).

lipstick lesbian – *noun*: Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

metrosexual – *adj.*: a man with a strong aesthetic sense who spends more time, energy, or money on his appearance and grooming than is considered gender normative.

MSM / WSW – *abbreviations*: men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women, to distinguish sexual behaviors from sexual identities: because a man is straight, it doesn't mean he's not having sex with men.

Mx. /„mix" or „schwa"/ – an honorific (e.g. Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.) that is gender neutral.
outing – *verb*: involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

pansexual – *adj.*: a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to „pan".

passing – *adj. & verb*: **1** trans* people being accepted as, or able to „pass for", a member of their self-identified gender identity (regardless of sex assigned at birth) without being identified as trans*. **2** An LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

PGPs – *abbreviation*: preferred gender pronouns. Often used during introductions, becoming more common in educational institutions.

polyamory / polyamorous – *noun & adj.*: refers to the practice of, desire to, or orientation towards having ethically, honest, and consensual non-monogamous relationships (i.e. relationships that may include multiple partners).

queer – *adj.*: used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight. Also used to describe people who have a non-normative gender identity, or as a political affiliation.

questioning – *verb & adj.*: an individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

QPOC / QTPOC – *abbreviation*: initialisms that stand for queer people of color and queer and/or trans people of color.

same gender loving (SGL) – *adj.*: sometimes used by some members of the African-American or Black community to express an non-straight sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

sex assigned at birth (SAAB) – *abbreviation*: a phrase used to intentionally recognize a person's assigned sex (not gender identity). Sometimes called „designated sex at birth" (DSAB)

or „sex coercively assigned at birth“ (SCAB), or specifically used as „assigned male at birth“ (AMAB) or „assigned female at birth“.

sexual orientation – *noun*: the type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Often confused with sexual preference.

sexual preference – *noun*: the types of sexual intercourse, stimulation, and gratification one likes to receive and participate in. Generally when this term is used, it is being mistakenly interchanged with „sexual orientation“, creating an illusion that one has a choice (or „preference“) in who they are attracted to.

sex reassignment surgery (SRS) – *noun*: used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex.

skoliosexual – *adj.*: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some genderqueer, transgender, transsexual, and/or non-binary people.

spiritual attraction – *noun*: a capacity that evokes the want to engage in intimate behavior based on one's experience with, interpretation of, or belief in the supernatural (e.g., religious teachings, messages from a deity), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense).

stealth – *adj.*: a trans person who is not „out“ as trans, and is perceived by others as cisgender.

straight – *adj.*: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people who are not their same sex/gender. A more colloquial term for the word heterosexual.

stud – *noun*: most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as ‚butch' or ‚aggressive'.

TERF – *noun*: acronym for Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist, and is used to describe those radical feminists who oppose inclusion of transgender women in spaces they reserve exclusively for women assigned female at birth.

third gender – *noun*: for a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender.

top surgery – *noun*: this term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.

tranny chaser – *noun*: term describes a suitor, usually a man, whose sexual yearnings are to hook up with the object of his desire: a transsexual or transgender woman.

trans* – *adj.*: An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms.

transgender – *adj*.: A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that assigned at birth based on anatomical sex.

transition / transitioning – *noun & verb*: this term is primarily used to refer to the process a trans* person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

transman; transwoman – *noun* : An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transgender people or transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as assigned female sex at birth (sometimes referred to as trans-guy).

transphobia – *noun*: the fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans* people, the trans* community, or gender ambiguity.

transsexual – *noun & adj*.: a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth.

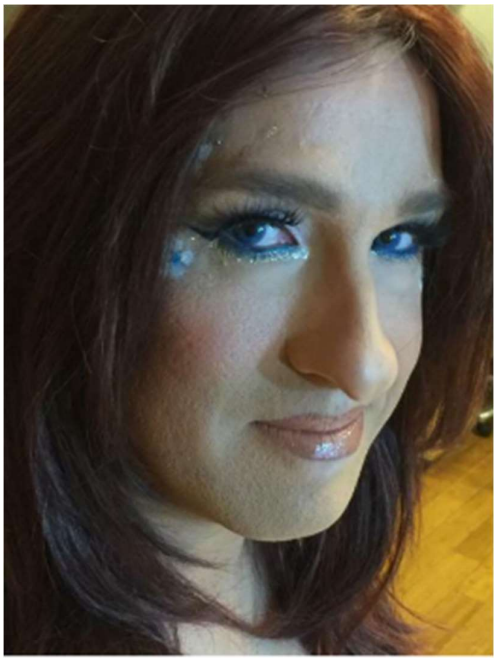
transvestite – *noun*: a person who dresses as the binary opposite gender expression („cross-dresses“) for any one of many reasons, including relaxation, fun, and sexual gratification (often called a „cross-dresser“, and should not be confused with transsexual).

triple T – *noun*: slang for „Trannier Than Thou“, an expression meant to criticize someone transgender who has either taken the position or exhibited behavior that indicates their transition was (or is) somehow better than another trans person's.

two-spirit – *noun*: is an umbrella term traditionally used by Native American people to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders.

ze / zir /„zee“, „zerr“ or „zeer“/ – alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some trans* people. They replace „he“ and „she“ and „his“ and „hers“ respectively.

2.30. About the Author



YOU UNDERSTAND MORE about my life from reading this book than most people with whom I interact with on a daily basis. Although I do live a dual life when it comes to colleagues, co-workers, and friends, I am an open book to the right people.

I hail from Detroit, Michigan, where the climate of acceptability in the 80s and 90s was less than stellar for crossdressers and other transgender folks. More than twenty years ago, I moved to Manhattan Island for work-related reasons. I discovered a world (or a couple of boroughs) where alternative lifestyles were much more socially acceptable. Eventually, I moved out to Long Island where I lived, worked, loved and explored my gender duality. Now, I have changed geography, again, to the Upstate of South Carolina in the hopes of a more stable future.

I hope the chronicling of my journey is of value to those in the search of better understanding of themselves as they seek out the knowledge to foster acceptance in a world where the crossdressing lifestyle may be found as foreign, misconstrued, and scary to certain people's sensibilities.

Live well, love well, and be the most beautiful creature you can be.

Also by Savannah Hauk

Living with Crossdressing

Living with Crossdressing: Defining a New Normal

Living with Crossdressing: Discovering Your True Identity

Gender 101: An A-Z Handbook & Exploration

Watch for more at Savannah Hauk's site https://livingwithcrossdressing.com/

Are you a cis-woman partner of a man who crossdresses? Are you struggling with what it means to be in a relationship with a man who you have discovered – by accident or his own admission – enjoys wearing feminine clothing?

Join me as I set out to uncover some of the reasons why so many men (including myself) dress as women. Read the stories of real couples who are looking for a new balance in their relationships, including the point of views of the women who decided to stand by their... ahem... men as they learn to better understand their crossdresser and learn how to cope and thrive.

Somewhere amid the misconceptions, stereotypes, and ignorance is the truth about non-transitioning, non-fetish, crossdressing men. But more than that is the strength and care of the women who continue to love and support them.

Read more at Savannah Hauk's site https://livingwithcrossdressing.com/.

2.32. A few photos of author

APPRECIATE
IMAGINE
STAY CALM
ACHIEVE
BELIEVE
IN YOURSELF
FOLLOW
YOUR
HEART